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DAVID PERRY

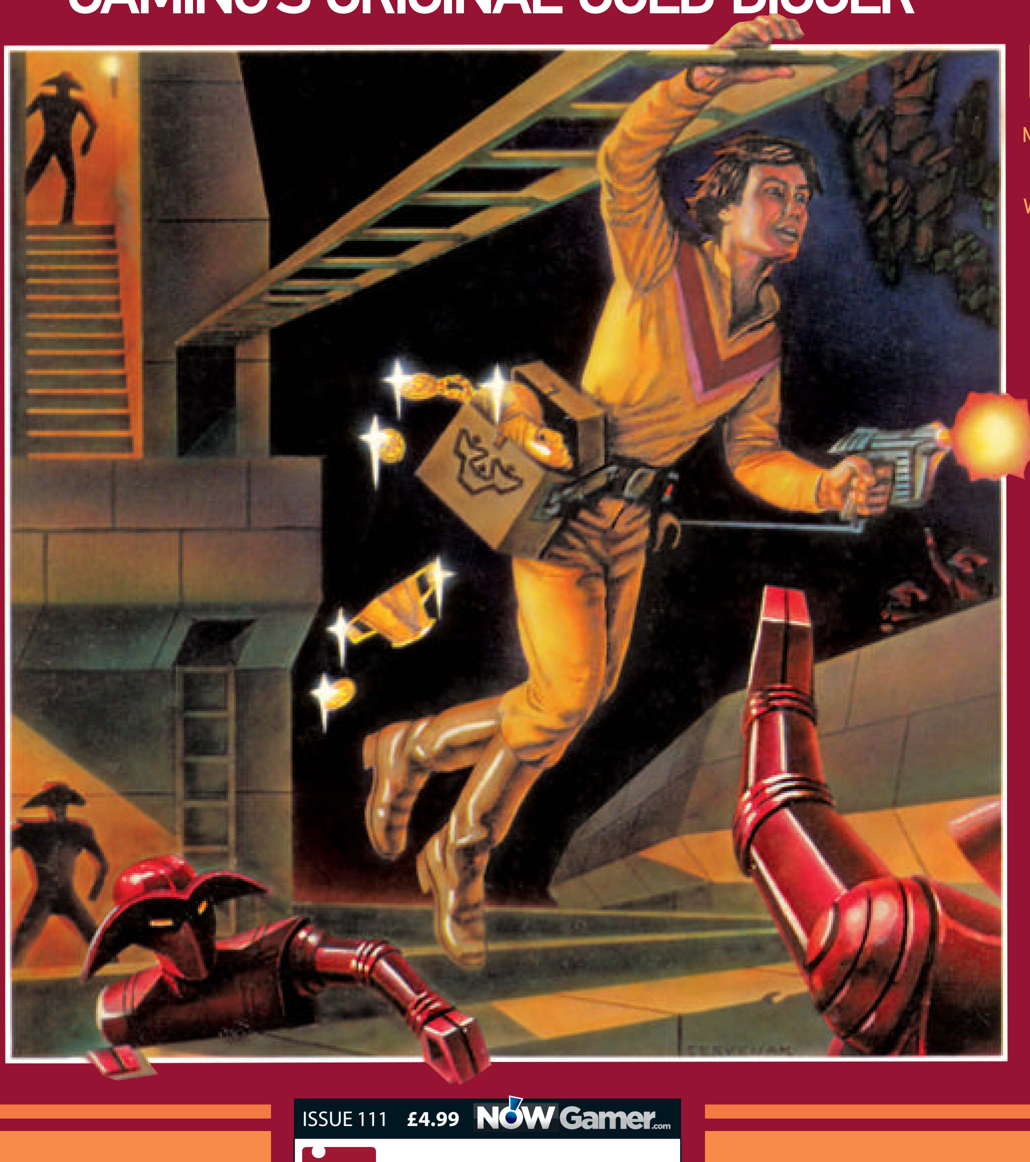
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"WE MADE MISTAKES, BUT LEARNED FROM THEM"

HOW HIT RTS WARCRAFT HELPED DEFINE BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

CARRIER COMMAND

REALTIME GAMES ON CREATING ITS OPEN WORLD 16-BIT MASTERPIECE

PC ENGINE

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF NEC'S EVER-EVOLVING 8-BIT CONSOLE



RAMPART

JOHN SALWITZ ON CREATING HIS MEDIEVAL ALTERNATIVE TO TETRIS

PORTAL

WILL YOU STILL PLAY VALVE'S EPIC PUZZLER IN YEARS TO COME?

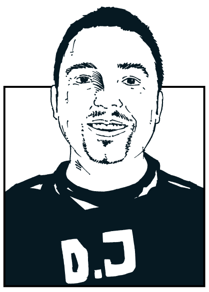
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DARRAN JONES
Devil Crush for me. I'm a huge fan of pinball games and this one was absolutely fantastic thanks to its imaginative table design and a supernatural theme.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Zombi U
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT
I've always had a soft spot for the barmy but addictive paparazzi simulator *Photograph Boy*. Its story is utterly bonkers, but it has great visuals and gameplay.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently Playing:
Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed
Favourite game of all time:
Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed



CRAIG GRANNELL
Probably *R-Type*, largely on the basis of how close it managed to get to the arcade game, at a time when other systems were nowhere near.
Expertise:
Games that don't require 36 fingers to play
Currently playing:
Loads of Letterpress
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



JASON KELK
I love a good shoot-'em-up so I'll say *Super Star Soldier*, partly for the timed modes.
Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero
Currently playing:
Delta
Favourite game of all time:
Io



MARTYN CARROLL
Obviously *R-Type*. I remember seeing this running in a local import shop and couldn't believe how close it was to the arcade version.
Expertise:
Sinclair stuff
Currently playing:
Far Cry Instincts
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



PAUL DRURY
The PC Engine is a console I've only played at retro events but I've been suitably impressed with the machine's versions of *Parodius* and *R-Type*. And that *Gekisha Boy* looks fun, too.
Expertise:
Jet Set Willy bugs
Currently playing:
Professor Layton and the Miracle Mask
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space

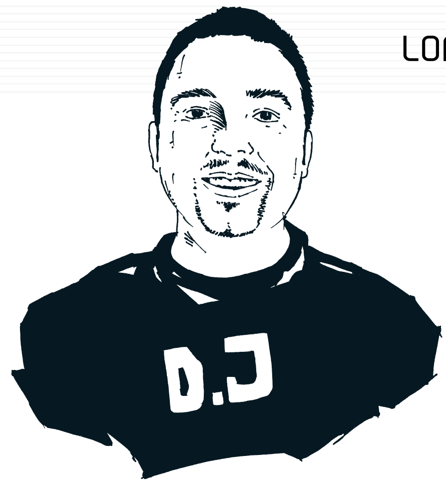


RICHARD BURTON
Parodius, the absurd shoot-'em-up based on *Gradius*. Where else could you destroy a flying cat-ship or dodge through a showgirl's legs in space? Bonkers but fantastic.
Expertise:
Stuff and Spectrums
Currently playing:
Phoenix
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



DAVID CROOKES
R-Type. It was the game, which cemented the PC Engine's position and made it the excellent system that it was.
Expertise:
All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Karateka
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword

LOADING...



Gaming is changing and it's changing fast. Last year for Christmas my daughter asked me for a copy of *The Sims 3 Supernatural*, a franchise she is completely obsessed with. She'd seen that it was on sale for just £15, which was admittedly a bargain. I mentioned to her that the retail copy was twice that price, to which she replied: "I don't care what it comes on, Dad, I just want to be able to play it."

This made me sad, because it just highlights how much the younger generation just don't seem to appreciate physical media anymore. Don't get me, wrong, I'm as much a fan of the Steam sales as anyone, but I still love to buy physical media, particularly when it comes to Blu-rays and old Saturn games.

I have absolutely no problem giving somebody an iTunes or Amazon voucher for Christmas, but I draw the line at giving someone a download code for a game, even if it's a really, really good one. Part of the joy of Christmas was ripping up the wrapping, and enjoying the glorious packaging before playing your new game. As gaming continues to evolve and the likes of Valve's new Steam Box begin to take shape, I fear those days are coming to an end. It really does feel like the end of an era…

Enjoy the magazine,



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>> Load 111 Breathing new life into classic games

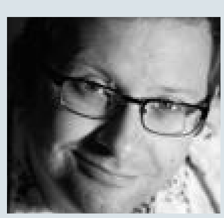
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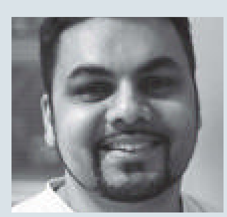
RETRO REVIVALS

Lode Runner



In the hot seat this month…



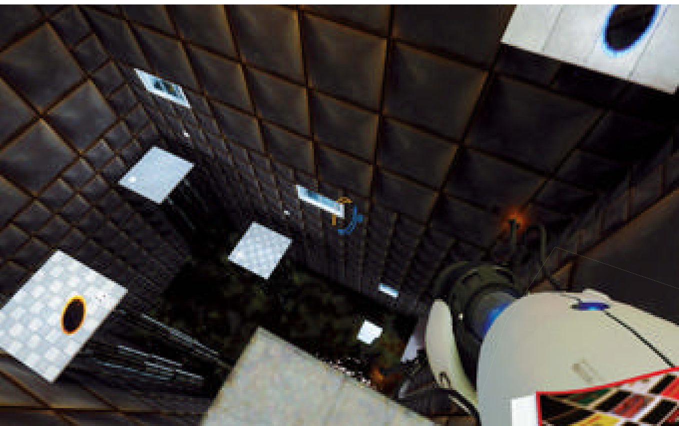






"A small and perfectly formed puzzle game"

Samuel Roberts



64 Future Classic

Samuel Roberts explains why you should play Portal, Valve's groundbreaking physics-based brain teaser



86 Warcraft

How Blizzard created its fantasy alternative to *Command & Conquer*





56 The Evolution Of The PC Engine

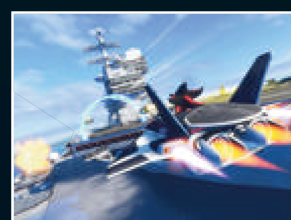
We celebrate 25 years of NEC's micro console by revisiting its main forms

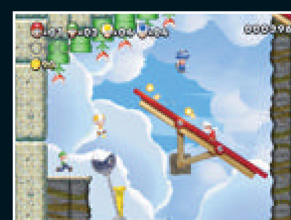
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Discover how Realtime Games made its revolutionary 16-bit computer hit

ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED





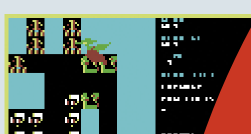
retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



18 CRASH CRUMBLE CHOMP

Reader Glenn Petrie recalls the time he played this *Rampage* clone on his C64 and why he prefers it







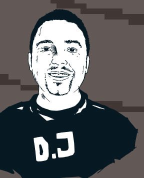
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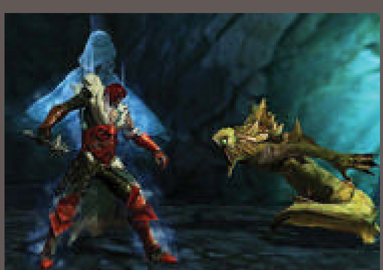
retroradar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> This month sees another classic 8-bit game attempting to return to the big leagues. Dizzy's return certainly looked uncertain as we went to press, but you can't help but be impressed by the ambitious plans the Oliver twins have set themselves. We also speak to Chris Wilkins about his new retro event and look at the big incoming games of this year

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DIZZY RETURNS?

CAN THE OLIVER TWINS' CLASSIC HERO BECOME THE LATEST KICKSTARTER DARLING?



» Philip and Andrew Oliver revisit *Dizzy* personally for the first time in 20 years.

D*izzy* has often split critics right down the middle. Today, however, the star of what was billed as '*The Ultimate Cartoon Adventure*' has been causing controversy of a different kind. In announcing a brand new game on Kickstarter, The Oliver Twins were slammed by some gaming commentators for asking for cash. They said the siblings were the bosses of the sizeable Blitz Game Studios, which employs more than 200 people and could and should just go about funding it themselves.

Philip and Andrew Oliver answered their detractors by posting a lengthy explanation on Kickstarter. And while at the time of going to press it was looking unlikely that the game would be funded, the fact that *Dizzy* has bounced its way back into the limelight has to be welcomed. When you consider that this is the culmination of years of petitions, intense negotiations with Codemasters and much frustration among fans, it has certainly been a long road. *Dizzy Returns* marked a fresh, ambitious project, albeit one that requires a whopping £350,000 investment from its fans.

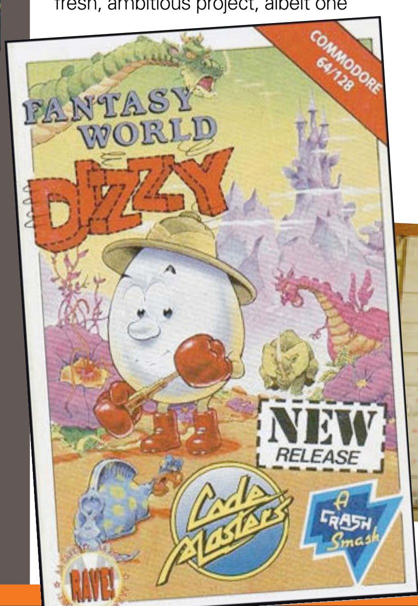


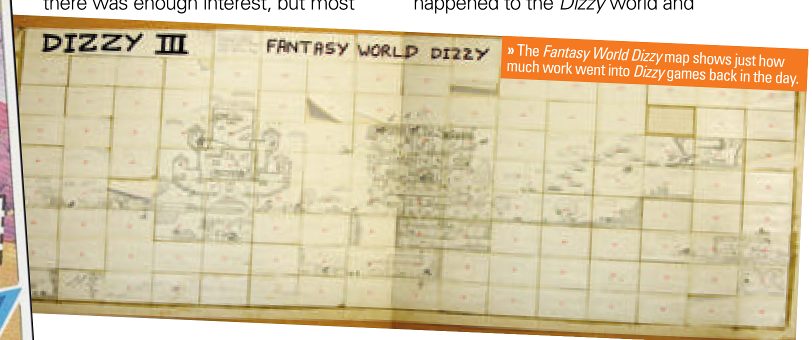
» [Spectrum] One of the puzzles from *Fantasy World Dizzy* which showed great inspiration.

While the funding was looking unlikely as we were going to press, Philip Oliver was in a surprisingly buoyant mood. "*Dizzy Returns* is the game we've wanted to make for many years but until now there's not been a good model that would provide the funding we needed while still allowing us to retain total control over the creative decisions," he told us. He said that Kickstarter was the perfect platform for creating a new *Dizzy*, as not only did it allow them to gauge interest in the project, and fund it if there was enough interest, but most importantly, it let them work directly with fans of the series.

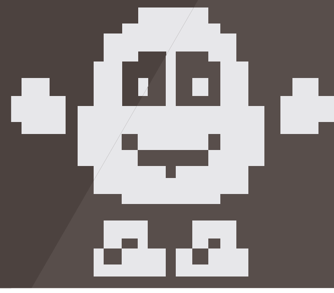
In the course of creating a Kickstarter plan, The Oliver Twins revealed that a plot for the game had already been formulated although they were careful not to reveal too much. In some respects this was due to the promise that fans would be able to have their input via a developer forum and that some puzzles would be produced by a backer, depending on the amount of cash being put up.

"What we can tell you is that it's 20 years since the last *Dizzy* game, and the story will focus on what has happened to the *Dizzy* world and





» The *Fantasy World Dizzy* map shows just how much work went into *Dizzy* games back in the day.



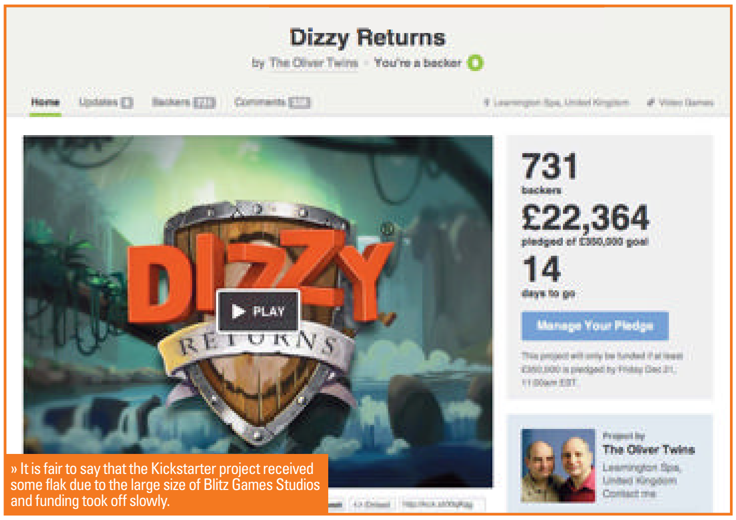


» [Spectrum] *Dizzy*'s third adventure was notable for introducing the Yolkfolk to the popular franchise.

the characters since that time," said Andrew as the Kickstarter campaign was in full swing. "We'll be building on established *Dizzy* lore and will be including lots of nods to the past games that *Dizzy* fans will be able to spot and hopefully smile at. We'll be answering some old questions and posing lots of new ones too, so in that respect there will also be a focus on the future of the Yolkfolk and the *Dizzy* world."

Backers were promised a wealth of goodies, as is usual with Kickstarter projects. They ranged from a digital PC copy of the game and regular updates from those stumping up a tenner, to the promise of a visit to the studios, dinner with the Oliver Twins and being able to design and name a character. This costs £5,000.

"We felt it was incredibly important to us to work with the fans," says Philip. "After all, we're asking for their financial support, so why wouldn't we want their creative input too?" He said that they had loads of plans for great new features, puzzles and ways of playing, but that he wanted fans to put forward their favourite bits from the original game that they'd like to see come back today. One of their main goals was to capture the spirit and magic of the original games.



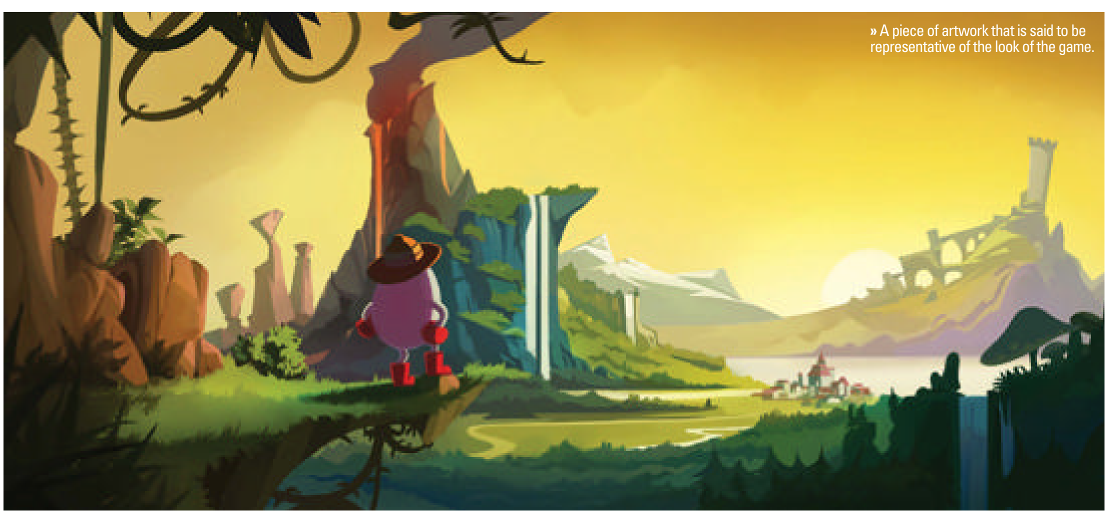
» It is fair to say that the Kickstarter project received some flak due to the large size of Blitz Games Studios and funding took off slowly.

> **"Bringing Dizzy up to date is something we've wanted to do for a long time"**

What all of this shows is that there is willingness by the Twins to take *Dizzy* in a fresh direction and they have worked hard on a new story, characters, locations and puzzles. The developers also say they are delighted to have control of *Dizzy* again. The remade *Prince Of The Yolkfolk* game was developed by Paul Ranson, who worked on the original 1991 title, over which there were lots of legal wranglings through the years.

"Bringing *Dizzy* up to date is something we've wanted to do for a long time, not just with better looking graphics and the like, but also gameplay-wise," adds Philip. "The technology available to us as developers certainly has changed over the last 20 years, but the way in which we actually play games has changed too. Making a gaming experience that is fun, rewarding and satisfying but most importantly relevant to gamers today is one of our biggest challenges." We sincerely hope Dizzy gets his chance.





» A piece of artwork that is said to be representative of the look of the game.

Getting Dizzy

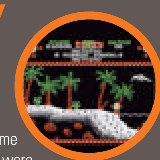
» Andrew Oliver looks back over an eggs-cellent series

Dizzy – The Ultimate Cartoon Adventure



"This was the very first *Dizzy* game. It was a slow-burner but it gradually began to catch the public's imagination. Sales of this game took off massively when we released the sequel."

Treasure Island Dizzy



"A year after *Dizzy, Treasure Island Dizzy* went to number one instantly and we were amazed at its reception and success. The biggest regret here though is probably that we only gave the player one life to complete the game and some of the water-based puzzles were perhaps a touch too tough."

Fantasy World Dizzy



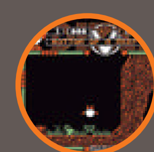
"This was the first outing of the Yolkfolk – Dizzy now had a family! *Fantasy World Dizzy* also had a far more involved story than the first games, which we were really happy about. We followed up with *Dizzy 3 And A Half: Into Magicland* which was exclusively for *Crash* only."

Magicland Dizzy



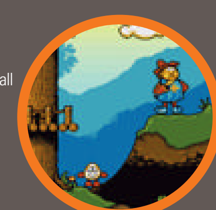
"*Magicland Dizzy* was the first in the series that we didn't actually code, although we worked with friends. This was made whilst we were writing *Fantastic Dizzy* on NES and we didn't want to leave the Spectrum market behind."

Spellbound Dizzy



Philip designed pretty much the whole of *Spellbound Dizzy* as Andrew was busy coding *Fantastic Dizzy* on NES at the time.

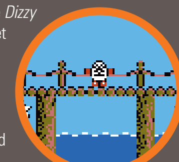
Dizzy Prince Of The Yolkfolk



"Although this was the smallest of all the *Dizzy* games, it was beautifully colourful and had a really nice feel. This is the game that was revived last year and did so well in bringing Dizzy back."

Fantastic Dizzy

"Our favourite *Dizzy* game ever, this took more than a year to make which was more time than the previous games. It was a combination of the first three *Dizzy* games. Normally they sold at a budget price but because this was designed for NES and was going to sell for $40/$50 we needed to make it much more impressive. It was also the time that we started a proper company and began employing people."



Crystal Kingdom Dizzy



'The last *Dizzy* game is actually a bit of a blur because we were so busy building our new company, but Andrew still managed to do pretty much all the coding!"



» Expect a great selection of retro games to be at the event.

RETRO REVIVAL

NEW RETRO EVENT LATER THIS YEAR

As enjoyable as Replay was, some felt it was becoming a little too commercial, with more focus on modern gaming. Chris Wilkins feels so too, as he's organising a new event with Turnarcades' Craig Turner which will be predominently retro. We spoke to Chris about Revival.

So what can you tell us about it?
Those who came to my previous events know what to expect – a wealth of retro systems, arcade machines and gaming guests fuelled by a social atmosphere. I have teamed up with Craig from Turnarcades and Dave and Anna from Attic Bug in order to increase the size of the show this time round – the venue can hold upwards of 1,000 visitors per day (previous events have been around the 200 visitor mark). The event will predominantly be retro – there will be modern systems, but the games being showcased/played will have a retro slant. Revival will also be home to a large trader area within which all sections of the retro scene will be catered for – so if you are after a boxed Commodore 64, a personalised poster of one of Bob Wakelin's Ocean covers or even a cable for your Spectrum your needs will be catered for.



» Archer will be bringing a few of his arcade machines along.



» Expect lots of speakers. Here's Archer Maclean, Sandy White and Simon Goodwin discussing the good old days.

You mention 'Retro Culture' on your website, what does this entail?
As with the *Retro Fusion* magazine, we will endeavour to cover all areas of your nostalgic memories. So along with the games, consoles and arcade machines that we fondly remember, expect to see stalls selling retro sweets, a toy area within which you can play *TCR* and Scalextric and possibly a comic or two from the Eighties to flick through.

What sort of machines can we expect to see at Revival?
A great selection of consoles, computers, arcade machines and pinball tables. We will be looking at hooking up many of the older systems for multiplayer – so expect to see deathmatch *Doom* on the Playstation, *Age of Empires* and *Command & Conquer* on the PC and *OutRun 2* on the Xbox amongst many others.

Will there be any guest speakers?
We will bringing many of the Ocean team to Revival – with *The History of Ocean* book now well underway as a result of the funding from our recent Kickstarter campaign expect to see many of the coders, musicians and management from this great company. We also have the likes of Archer Maclean (who will be bringing a small number of his pristine cabinets). the Oliver Twins, a number of the guys from Gremlin Graphics, Allister Brimble from Team 17 and many more.

Some people feel events like Replay are getting too commercial. How will you combat this?
This event is not for profit. We plan to have the Warwickshire Air Ambulance and the Retro Computer Museum as registered charities that we will be donating any profit from the event to.

Revival will run from 18-19 May at Wolverhampton Racecourse. Head to www.revivalretroevents.com for more information.

PATRICK MOORE 1923-2012

GAMESMASTER LEGEND PASSES AWAY



Just as we were going to press, news reached us that Sir Patrick Moore passed away, peacefully at his home in West Sussex on 9 December.

While Moore was known for being a world famous astronomer and presenting *The Sky At Night* for 55 years, gamers will remember him fondly for his appearance on the popular Channel 4 show *GamesMaster*. Playing the titular Games Master (essentially a robotic disembodied head) Moore appeared in pre-recorded inserts alongside presenter Dominik Diamond. Moore would give out challengers to contestants and would also dish out handy helps and tips. His co-presenter Diamond tweeted "What? He also did a show about planets? I just did the puerile gags. But he WAS the Gamesmaster. RIP Sir Patrick Moore, a true original."


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NEW YEAR, NEW GAMES

WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2013





The incoming year is an interesting one for gaming. Microsoft and Sony are expected to announce (but not necessarily release new consoles) while Nintendo will make the most of the head start it has on its rivals. As a result of all this uncertainness a lot of publishers are sitting tight, refusing to announce their plans for the incoming year.

Fortunately, it's not all bad news as there are plenty of great games on the way, that should all be arriving throughout the year. The earliest is Ninja Theory's *Devil May Cry*, which will be hitting shortly after this issue comes out. That's being followed up with console ports of *Painkiller: Hell & Damnation*. We've not seen it yet, but we're hoping that the delay between the console and PC releases means that it will include the 20 odd levels that were missing from the PC game…

Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance should be appearing in the early half of 2013, and it's already looking to be every bit as mental as *Bayonetta* (which is also receiving a sequel round about the same time). Konami also has *Metal Gear Ground Zeroes*, which is the first game to use Kojima Productions' astonishing looking 'Fox' engine and two sequels to the excellent *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow*. The aptly named *Lords Of Shadow 2* should appear later on in the year (October would be a good bet) while the 3DS spin-off, *Mirror Of Fate*, should hopefully arrive later this month.



Keeping with the Nintendo theme, other 3DS titles to look forward to include *Animal Crossing: New Leaf, Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon*. Both titles have been promised for ages now, so we're hoping the lengthy wait has been used to add plenty of bells and whistles to them. In terms of Wii U it's pretty quiet, with only *Pikmin 3* and the glorious looking *Rayman Legends* (which was originally planned as a launch title) currently interesting us. Of course it goes without saying that the likes of *Zelda, Mario Kart, Donkey Kong* and *Metroid* will eventually appear, but so far Nintendo isn't saying anything.

Staying with what we do know, Crystal Dynamic's reboot of *Tomb Raider* is getting ever closer, and we're greatly looking forward to the end result. It appears to be borrowing from everything to *Uncharted* and *Silent Hill*, but as long as there are dank and dusty tombs to explore (or even raid) we'll be more than happy. *Grand Theft Auto V* is another huge game that's incoming, while Electronic Arts is preparing to unleash its reboot of Wil Wright's *SimCity* in March. Phew, that should keep us going until E3…

Retro Gamer Picks THE GAMES WE WANT THE MOST



Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow 2

The original was a great reboot and proved that there was life left in the franchise. We're looking forward to some good old-fashioned handheld action courtesy of *Mirror Of Fate*.



Animal Crossing: New Leaf

Previous *Animal Crossing*'s have been a little lazy. We're hoping that *New Leaf* suggests that Nintendo will be adding plenty of new gameplay mechanics to its charming life sim.



Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon

This is definitely on our want list. Nintendo appears to be adding plenty of new gameplay mechanics, and has confirmed it will be a larger game than its GameCube predecessor.



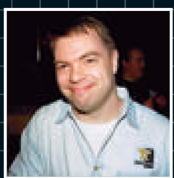
Tomb Raider

Crystal Dynamics' gritty new take on Lara Croft is agonisingly close now. There's an emphasis on survival horror, which is refreshing, but we hope the core mechanics of exploration also remain.

retrodiary

2 January – 1 February

>> A month of retro events both past and present



3 January 1966
Martin Galway, video games musician extraordinaire, is born in Belfast, Northern Ireland.



4 January 2001
Jagex Games releases *Runescape*, the fantasy MMORPG, for PC.

6 January 2005
French videogames publisher, Titus Interactive, is declared bankrupt after being in receivership for three months.

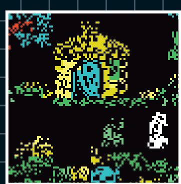
7 January 1985
Have it! Spectrum-owning football fans rejoiced with the release of Ocean's *Match Day*.



8-11 January 2013
The International CES is being held once again in the Las Vegas Convention Centre, Nevada, USA.



9 January 1985
Hewson releases *Technician Ted* on the Spectrum.



10 January 1986
Robin Of The Wood is released by Odin on the Spectrum and C64.



11 January 1985
The follow-up to Mike Singleton's excellent *Lords Of Midnight*, *Doomdark's Revenge* is released by Beyond.

13 January 1984
Newsfield Publications first issue of *Crash* magazine appears in newsagents across the UK.

15 January 1987
The first issue of *LM*, the innovative but short-lived lifestyle magazine from Newsfield Publications, appears.



15 January 1990
Lucasfilm release *Loom* on PC, a graphical adventure involving Bobbin Threadbare, swans and the Guild of Weavers.



15 January 2013
Capcom's *Lost Planet 3*, a prequel to the two previous games, is due for release on PS3, Xbox 360 and PC.



18 January 2013
First-person shooter sequel *Sniper 2: Ghost Warrior* is due to be released on PS3, Xbox 360, PC and Wii U.



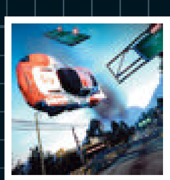
19 January 2001
The cult RPG *The Legend Of Dragoon*, published by Sony, is released in Europe on the PlayStation.



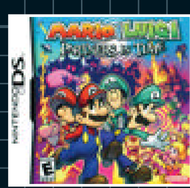
19 January 2012
Japan is the first to receive *WipEout 2048*, the futuristic racing game, on the PlayStation Vita handheld console.



21 January 2011
BioWare's action role play third-person shooter game *Mass Effect 2* arrives on PS3.



25 January 2008
Crashing, smashing and vehicular mashing arrives on PS3 with the European release of *Burnout Paradise*.



27 January 2006
Nintendo release the Nintendo DS RPG, *Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time*, in Europe.

29 January 2009
Ensemble Studios, creators of the *Age Of Empires* franchise, is closed down.



1 February 2012
New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.



A MOMENT WITH...

Brian Baglow

Every issue, we put a legend in the hotseat. This month, we met Brian Baglow, the former head of 'propaganda and indoctrination' at DMA Design and PR for Rockstar

Who is Brian Baglow?

He started his career creating nuclear power station control room simulators but he went on to the deal with the media explosion that erupted following the launch of *Grand Theft Auto*. As the top PR man for both DMA Design and *Grand Theft Auto*, he also wrote screenplays and written materials for the likes of *GTA 2* and *3, Codename Eagle, Flying Heroes* and *Hidden & Dangerous* and generally made a nuisance of himself, as he reveals.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
Wild Metal Country. It was totally different to everything on the market at the time. You played a tank and were sent down to a planet populated entirely by other, animal-like tanks, to track down power cores. Each tank behaved like a different animal. It was sandbox, it had superb physics, it had some of the best AI ever and everything from the level design to the sound engine was created to build this entirely new world. I was always sorry that the game didn't get the same sort of attention that *Body Harvest* or *GTA* did.

What is your proudest memory?
Seeing the first game I worked on, *Grand Theft Auto*, on the shelves in shops in Dundee. I stood there for about an hour watching – waiting for someone to buy one (they didn't).

What's been the most difficult thing you've ever encountered while working on a game?
Trying to encourage more than 30 testers, programmers and artists to enthusiastically shout caveman-type phrases and sounds I had written, for a never-released game called *Attack*. It was a miserable wet and cold Wednesday in Dundee and I had no cattle prod to hand. Plus, making developers enthusiastic about anything is moderately difficult. The result was too dismal to keep, let alone use.

Which veteran of the videogames industry do you most admire?
Gary Penn. He's forged his own path like a bold empire explorer in the 1900s, with a pith helmet, ludicrous moustache and very, very, very long shorts. And he's neither cynical, bitter nor jaded. Bastard.

How would you like your games to be remembered?
Fun. Original.

Which game do you wish you'd made and why?
Portal. It's a bewildering three-dimensional puzzle title in which the writing elevates the game into something entirely new and wonderful.

What opportunities has making videogames given you?
Twenty years later I am still working in videogames. It's saved me from having to find and keep a proper grown-up job. Plus I've made so many incredible friends and worked with a huge number of really original and fun games.

What's your darkest memory of being in the games industry?
Passing out in a plate of ribs in a restaurant in Chelsea on the evening of day two of ECTS in 1997 after a couple of days of VERY hard work pushing *GTA* to the world's press on the BMG stand (which, coincidentally, had a free bar).

And your best?
The full page article in the *News Of The World* in which I am pictured and described as a 'SICK CAR CRIME GAME BOSS' since no one else at the company wanted to do it. I had to very carefully talk my parents out of suing them.

> "I had to very carefully talk my parents out of suing News Of The World"



» [PC] *Hidden & Dangerous* is just one of the many games Brian has written for.



» [PC] *Portal* is Brian's favourite game and it's easy to see why. We're betting he's a huge fan of the sequel as well.

Can you share one interesting anecdote about your time in the industry with us? Anything GTA related?
There are SO many and they're all more or less libellous, so it's a tricky one. Here's a good one. I spoke at an event in Scotland a year or so ago, to an audience of around 200 high school kids. I introduced myself told them some of the games I worked on and they all cheered when I mentioned *GTA*. I asked everyone who'd played it to put their hands up. It was pretty much all of them. I then asked everyone over 18 to keep their hands up. All of the hands went down. So I told them that the game was an 18, that they'd broken the law and I took out my mobile to 'call the police'. Pandemonium. It took the teachers about half an hour to calm them down and reassure them they were not about to get arrested. I've not been asked back.

How do you feel the videogames industry has changed and developed over the last 20 years?
Bizarrely, we're coming full circle. Thanks to the smaller platforms, new software tools and digital distribution, now all you need to make a game is a good idea and some technical know how. You don't need a publisher, you don't need millions, you don't need a huge team. The future is once more in the hands of the creators. It's entirely awesome.

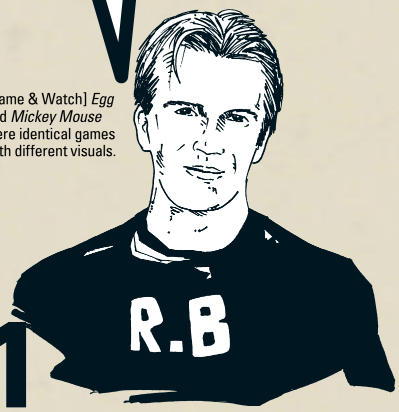
BACK TO THE EIGHTIES





» [Game & Watch] *Egg* and *Mickey Mouse* were identical games with different visuals.

OCTOBER 1981 – It's coin-operated games galore with Amidar, Turtles, Qix, Lady Bug, Frogger, Tempest and Stargate all vying to scoff your loose change. Richard Burton gets his coin wedged in the slot…



THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 1981

October welcomed a coin-op avalanche with a multitude of cabinets unveiled. Grab yourself a rather large fistful of 10p pieces – this month is going to eat through your hard-earned pocket money like no other…

Laying the arcade foundations for a cracking month were Konami and Stern Electronics, developer and publisher of both *Amidar* and *Turtles*. *Turtles* is a simple maze game which saw you having to rescue your turtle babies from the numerous bugs that patrol the maze and take them home. Bombs can be utilised to keep the bugs at bay. Get them home and it's up a level…

Amidar was more involved but was another game that followed the popular maze game path. Slightly bizarre was the choice of your main characters, which alternated every odd and even level, from a gorilla to a paint roller. Your task was to manoeuvre around the maze collecting every coconut or painting every pathway as you go, avoiding the obligatory enemies. Once a segment of the maze was fully collected or painted and, in a vaguely similar style to Taito's *Qix*, it would become coloured in and points duly awarded. You also had a jump button to get you out of tight predicaments. *Amidar* proved to be the more popular spawning several clones and variants.

Continuing the maze theme, the aforementioned *Qix* was also released. The territory-claiming game saw you control a small dot that roams the edge of an empty play area. You must cut into the area and start to claim space by fencing off the space with the trail your spot leaves behind. Once an area is completely surrounded, it becomes coloured in and the percentage of the screen you have claimed is noted. You must claim 75% of the total screen to progress to the next level. There is also enemy avoidance, with the Qix and Sparx which roam the screen hoping for a life-ending collision.



» [Arcade] *Qix* was an incredibly addictive arcade game by Taito.

While *Qix* looks like a tedious game with virtually no discernable graphics, it was quite the opposite and must surely be regarded as one of the most simplistic yet addictive games released.

Next up was *Lady Bug* developed by Universal Games. Although not a particularly popular game, *Lady Bug* was a quirky *Pac-Man* clone with a neat feature which allowed you change the design of the maze layout by door shifting, which would shut off pathways to pursuing insect nasties. *Lady Bug* was short term fun but nothing special.

What certainly was special was the iconic future classic, *Frogger*. Developed by Konami and distributed by Sega

OCTOBER 1981 NEWS

15 October saw the world premiere of the low budget cult horror classic with lashings of blood and dark humour, *The Evil Dead*. Directed by Sam Raimi and starring Bruce Campbell as Ash, it's the story of five college students holidaying in a remote cabin in the middle of an isolated forest. They find a tape, play it and the recorded incantations release demons which possess each student in turn. Each meets with a grisly ending involving buckets of blood, gore and animated Plasticine.

1 October saw former England and Manchester United football captain, Bryan Robson seal a move from West Bromwich Albion to Manchester United for a then British record transfer fee of £1.5 million. Zlatan Ibrahimovic, current striker for Sweden and Paris Saint Germain, was born on 3 October. His current monthly wage is just short of Robson's record transfer fee. 14 million Euros a year doesn't go very far these days…



18 October saw the debut of Bergerac, a police drama tv show set on the island of Jersey and starring John Nettles as Detective Sergeant John Bergerac. The series ran for just over ten years and 87 episodes.

22 October saw the UK cinema release of Disney's animated movie, *The Fox And The Hound*; a story of two childhood animal friends who eventually find out that one is supposed to hunt the other. Kurt Russell, having starred in the recently released *Escape From New York* as the eye-patched Snake Plissken, voice acted the part of Copper the hound.

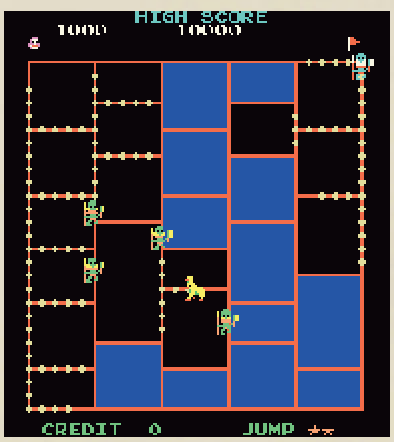


» [Arcade] *Lady Bug* is a bit like *Pac-Man* but with sliding doors… and insects…

and Gremlin (that's Gremlin Industries not Gremlin Graphics…) you controlled a frog that crosses a busy, traffic-filled road to get to its home. Once the road is traversed there's a river crossing to negotiate and that final jump to safety. *Frogger* remains a seminal coin-op and an era-defining game.

Atari entered the October arcade fray with *Tempest*. The classic vector graphic tube shooter was an instant hit when it was released on 12 October. *Tempest*'s designer was David Theurer who also created another Atari gaming legend, *Missile Command*. *Tempest* was a superbly designed frenetically paced tube shooter which saw you try and keep hoards of enemies at bay by firing down the segment of tube they were approaching from in your craft which encircles the end of the three dimensional tube. The aim of the game was purely to amass as many points as you could while surviving for as many levels as you could.

Tempest also introduced arcade gaming to a new innovation, it was the first coin-op to let you pick what your starting level. If you played well enough, the next game would allow you to start on a higher level.



» [Arcade] Collect the items, paint the paths and progress through *Amidar*'s levels as either a gorilla or paint roller.

Atari christened this feature as Skill Step but in essence, this was the birth of the continue feature. If you liked your shoot-em-ups a tad more conventional then *Stargate* from Williams Electronics was for you.

With a scrolling horizontal planetary surface as a backdrop, you must kill all of the aliens, who are intent on abducting anyone in the vicinity. It was developed for Williams by Vidz Kidz and played a lot like *Defender*… and for good reason; it was created by the same duo who had coded *Defender* while working for Williams; Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMar. Oh, and *Stargate* was also known by another name… *Defender II*.

Vid Kidz was formed when the pair decided to leave Williams Electronics to start their own company. Williams offered Vidz Kidz a deal to continue developing games for them and they accepted. Good job too as they later went on to create *Robotron: 2084*.

If you like your games to be coinless and slightly smaller than a Mini Clubman then two new Game & Watch releases by Nintendo would be welcome news. Both arrived on 9 October, the simple, repetitive yet addictive series saw *Egg* and *Mickey Mouse* released. *Egg* has you cast as a wolf catching eggs as they fall out the side of a hen house. Drop an egg, lose a life. Simple. Oddly, the *Mickey Mouse* Game & Watch also had you catching falling eggs from a hen house too. Coincidence? No.

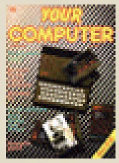
Both games were the same, bar small graphical changes. Australia and certain Asian countries gave Nintendo a headache, in that copyright issues with Disney in those territories stopped the release of the *Mickey Mouse* game so they were stuck with the *Egg* variant in their pocket (and on their face).

The first issue of the long running *Computer & Video Games* magazine reached the newsagents for the first time on 14 October, although it was listed as the November issue. Home computer gaming was beginning to gather pace…



» [Arcade] Atari's *Tempest* combined a 3D perspective with plenty of shooting and vector graphics.

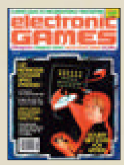
THIS MONTH IN…



YOUR COMPUTER

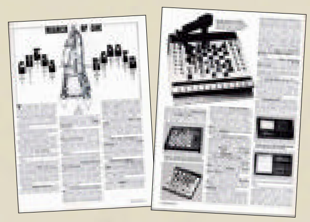
YC reviewed the Tandy TRS-80 Colour Computer, their answer to Commodore's excellent VIC-20 home computer. With a price tag of £349 for the basic system with 4K of memory, it was attractive, but sadly Commodore's aggressive marketing campaign for the VIC-20 meant it made little impact.

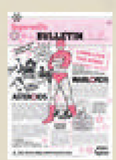




ELECTRONIC GAMES

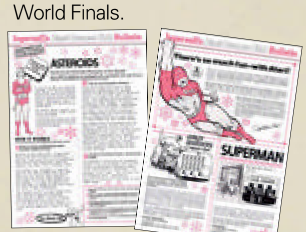
It's issue one, it's the winter edition and *EG* featured the gaming curiosities that were almost unique to the early Eighties – chess computers. Included in their rundown was the Computer Adversary, the top end chess computer that came complete with robotic arm for moving pieces.





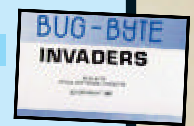
VCS OWNERS CLUB BULLETIN

A free magazine for UK Atari 2600 owners, this issue advertised the forthcoming International Asteroids Finals. Qualify locally, qualify for the UK Asteroids Contest and should you win that, you got an all expenses paid trip to Washington for the *Asteroids* World Finals.



CHARTS

OCTOBER 1981



ACORN ATOM

1 Space Invaders (Bug-Byte)

2 3D Asteroids (Program Power

3 Polecat (A & F Software)

4 Alien Maze (Program Power)

5 Fruit Machine (Bug-Byte)



ZX81

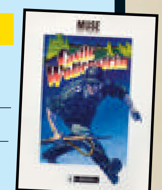
1 QS Defender (Quicksilva)

2 Star Trek (Silversoft)

3 Space Intruders (Macronics)

4 Planet Lander (Hewson Consultants)

5 Nightmare Park (Macronics)



APPLE II

1 Castle Wolfenstein (Muse)

2 Gorgon (Sirius)

3 Raster Blaster (BudgeCo Inc.)

4 Alien Typhoon (Star Craft)

5 Space Eggs (Sirius Software)

MUSIC

1 It's My Party (Barbara Gaskin with Dave Stewart)

2 The Birdie Song (Tweets)

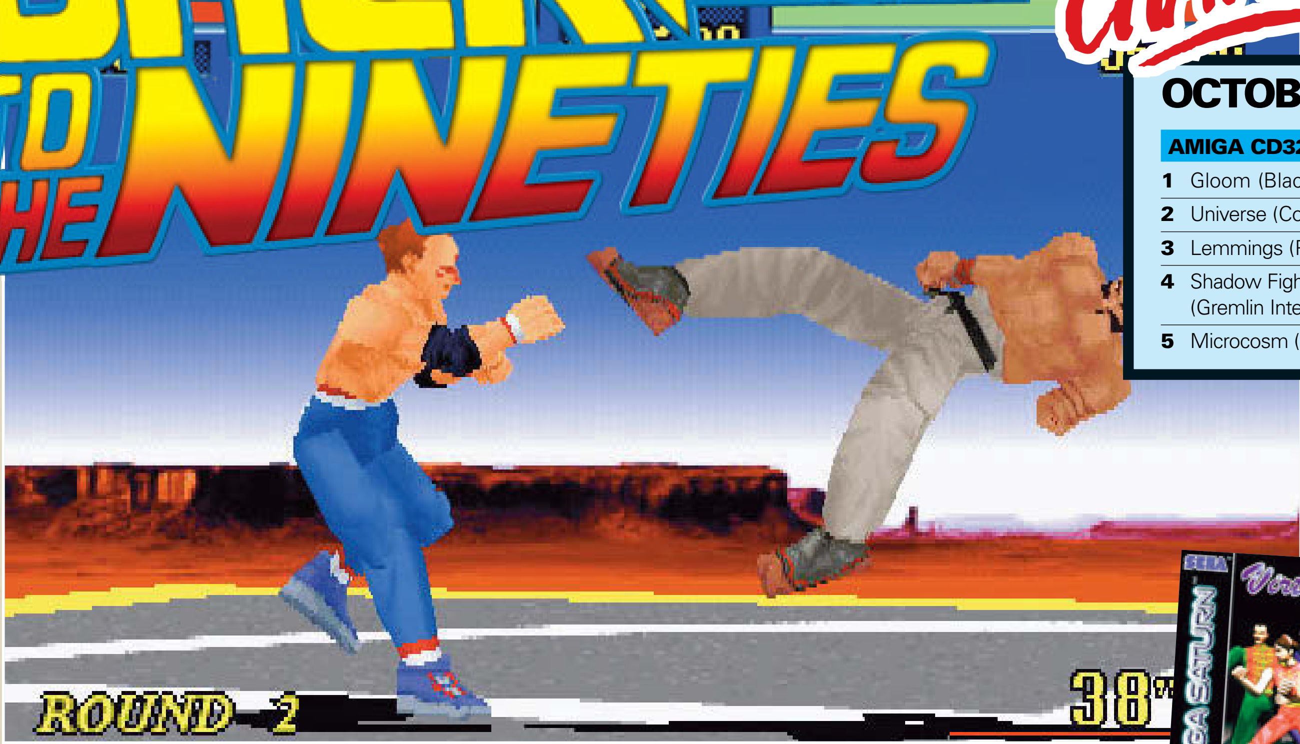
3 Prince Charming (Adam & The Ants)

4 Under Your Thumb (Godley & Creme)

5 O Superman (Laurie Anderson)



BACK TO THE NINETIES

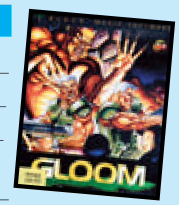


CHARTS

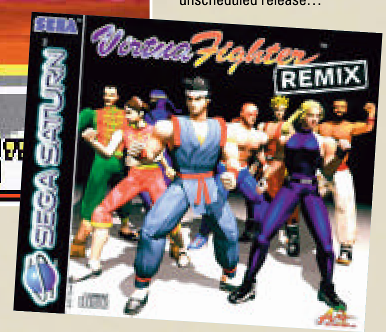
OCTOBER 1995

AMIGA CD32

1 Gloom (Black Magic)
2 Universe (Core Design)
3 Lemmings (Psygnosis)
4 Shadow Fighter (Gremlin Interactive)
5 Microcosm (Psygnosis)

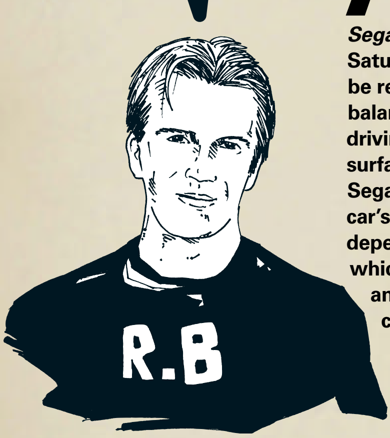


» [Sega Saturn] You would be well miffed if you had bought the original a few months before this unscheduled release…



THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 1995

OCTOBER 1995 – Sega rallies around, Namco goes raving, iD Software is quaking, SNK is the king of fighting, Virtua Fighter is reheated and games magazines come and go. Richard Burton pulls a skid…



A year after the arcade release, Sega posted a progress report on its latest coin-op conversions of *Sega Rally Championship*. The Sega Saturn version would be the first to be released and would be a superbly balanced mix of arcade racing and driving simulation. Terrain and driving surfaces were varied and thankfully Sega's attention to detail ensured the car's handling altered dramatically depending on various conditions, which included muddy tracks, gravel and tarmac surfaces along with changeable weather conditions.

A time trial mode racing against a ghost car was included, a terrific split-screen two player mode and there were three testing tracks with a hidden bonus track. It was arguably one of the best games released on the Saturn.

» [Sega Saturn] *Sega Rally Championship* brought a hint of realism to the world of arcade driving simulations.



Equally as much fun although restricted to those with a pocketful of loose change was Namco's coin-op sequel to its much loved *Ridge Racer* driving game, *Rave Racer*. The new game retained the original long and short tracks while introducing some new city and mountain tracks and crisper tighter graphics. Sadly it remained a coin-op only game after the Windows PC version was cancelled shortly after development had begun.

Under conversion to the newly released PlayStation was *Total Eclipse*; the shoot-em-up originally released on the 3DO by Crystal Dynamics and not the snail-paced Freescape-built arcade adventure released on various 8-bit systems by Incentive Software in 1988. That said, the premise for the new game could've been written in 1978… yep, it was the well-trodden path of aliens planning to destroy the Earth.

The PlayStation conversion was renamed *Total Eclipse Turbo* and was indeed a fast paced frenzy of blasting through a variety of tunnel and surface based levels. The graphics were suitably lovely but yet the game felt stale and about ten years out of date. Crystal Dynamics followed up with announced that a new shoot-'em-up sequel to *Total Eclipse*, namely *Solar Eclipse*, which would be developed for PlayStation and the Saturn. Thankfully, both versions were a vast improvement.

Fans of the iD Software's first-person shooter *Doom* were probably popping around the undergarment region when iD previewed their latest FPS called *Quake*. *Quake* promised some amazingly atmospheric graphics with texture mapped surroundings filled with eerie lighting and a swath of blood-thirsty opponents to frag. The detailed graphics with the seamless gameplay were great but add in the amazingly well designed levels and a choice of single player missions or a multiplayer bloodbath, *Quake* proved to be a must-have game when released.

While *Virtua Fighter*, *Street Fighter* and *Tekken* were taking the plaudits as fine examples of beat-'em-up games, SNK's

PLAYSTATION



1 Tekken (Namco)
2 Ridge Racer (Namco)
3 Jumping Flash (Sony)
4 Gunner's Heaven (Son
5 Ace Combat (Namco)

ATARI JAGUAR



1 Hoverstrike (Atari)
2 Alien Vs Predator (Atari)
3 Doom (Atari)
4 Theme Park (Atari)
5 Iron Soldier (Atari)

MUSIC



1 Fairground (Simply Red)
2 Gangsta's Paradise (Coolio featuring LV)
3 Mis-shapes / Sorted For E's & Wizz (Pulp)
4 Boombastic (Shaggy)
5 Who The F*ck Is Alice (Smokie featuring Roy Chubby Brown)

King Of The Fighters '95 was released and was just as good as any of those aforementioned titles… on the Neo Geo at least.

SNK, with the success of the original arcade game, Neo Geo CD and AES versions, decided to expand the new game onto more formats with *King Of The Fighters '95* being available to PlayStation, Saturn and even a cut down Game Boy rendition. These versions didn't translate too well, with the PlayStation version having sluggish character control and tediously slow loading times.

While others tinkered and experimented with 3D polygons, *KOTF '95* planted itself firmly in 2D beat-'em-up territory. With a roster of 24 fighters to choose from, including the debut of Iori Yagami, and the introduction of a team edit mode allowing you to build your own custom team, *KOTF '95* was well received. However, better *KOTF* games would supersede it as the franchise got bigger and better with sequels released on a yearly basis.

Fisticuffs continued on the Saturn and PC with *Virtua Fighter Remix*. With the first game selling extremely well and the sequel developing nicely and looking very sharp, Sega filled the wait with an updated version of the original release for Saturn and PC owners. *Remix* had the feel and playability of the first game but with the polygon counts of the forthcoming sequel and some very adept texture mapping. It also played quicker too. While all registered Saturn owners in America received a free copy of the game, Euroland got stiffed once again. With the original *Virtua Fighter* having been released just four months earlier, this newer superior version had you shelling out again.



» [PC] If it moves shoot it, shoot it again, check it's dead then shoot it some more in the face. Welcome to *Quake*!



» [Arcade] *Rave Racer* was a great sequel to *Ridge Racer*. Disappointing it never got converted to home systems.



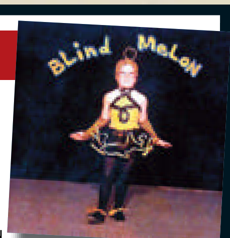
» [Neo Geo] *King Of Fighters '95* proved that SNK's fighters were more than capable of challenging *Street Fighter*.

Commodore 64 fans mourned the loss of *Commodore Format* published by Future Publishing, with it ending this month after a five year, 61 issue run. With new C64 software releases a rarity and gaming interests shifting toward 16-bit and console systems, *Commodore Format*'s commercial viability had all but dried up. It was a big hit from issue one and soon overtook long time C64 magazine favourite, Newsfield's *Zzap!64*, in the circulation war. However, the final issue ran to a flimsy 24 pages and cost £3.25.

As one magazine closes, another opens… but not for very long… *Maximum* published by EMAP was a delightfully indulgent monthly that was more at home on a coffee table than a teenager's bedroom. *Maximum* looked the part with glossiness abounds but backed it up with some incredibly in-depth analyses of new games.

The first issue featured *WipEout* on the PlayStation giving it fourteen pages of coverage. Other new releases such as *Tekken 2* and *Kabuki Klash* were also ably covered. *Maximum* had set the production bar very high but sadly, it lasted just seven issues. Each issue was a finely honed read but the time taken to produce each magazine often resulted in it appearing late on the newsstand. With a page count of 164 for issue one this wasn't surprising.

OCTOBER 1995 NEWS



3 October saw the verdict given on one of the longest criminal trials in US legal history when OJ Simpson was found not guilty of the double murder of his ex-wife Nicole and her friend. He was promptly released after spending 473 days in police custody.

17 October saw French lady Jeanne Calment become the oldest living person ever recorded when she reached the age of 120 years and 238 days. She passed away on the 4 August 1997 at the age of 122 years and 164 days. She is still the only person to have ever reached an age over 120 years.

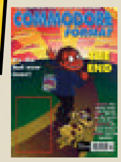
23 October proved to be a sad day for British television when the first episode of a new soap opera based in a fictional suburb of Chester called Hollyoaks aired. Marginally less grating was the debut on US television of *Street Fighter*, an animated series, which aired for the first time on 21 October and lasted for two 13-episode series. In relation to the videogames and movie, it was set somewhere after *Street Fighter II* and a loosely based sequel to the movie. Either way, it wasn't great.

6 October saw more animation with the UK release of Disney's beautiful *Pocohontas* in cinemas.

21 October saw the death of Shannon Hoon, lead singer for the American rock band Blind Melon. He died of a heart attack due to a cocaine overdose aged just 28.

THIS MONTH IN…

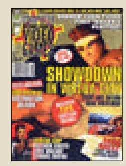
COMMODORE FORMAT



The last issue and with it the easy two-page feature option of the ten best C64 games ever. Included was *Mayhem In Monsterland* which *CF* followed through its entire development eventually deciding to give it a perfect 100%. Also sneaking in were *Creatures, Smash TV, HeroQuest* and, rather oddly, *Myth*.



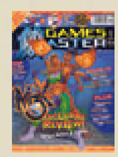
COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



C&VG reviewed games for the newly released (and panned) Virtual Boy from Nintendo. With its distinct red and black graphics and knack of giving gamers a throbbing headache, the Virtual Boy didn't have too many fans. The games, according to *C&VG* though, were well worth a look, particularly *Red Alarm* and *Teleroboxer*.



GAMESMASTER



With first-person shooters being the gaming genre of choice, *Gamesmaster* had their *Doom Dungeon* feature brimming with all manner of FPS info. The most exciting of which was the impending PC version of *Duke Nukem 3D* although the violence and portrayal of women raised a few eyebrows.



READER'S REVIVAL



WIND
WEST

HEADING
WEST

TIME
3

HEAD TILT

FORWARD

RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** GLENN PETRIE
» **JOINED:** JAN 2009
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» **OCCUPATION:** UNEMPLOYED
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** C64

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Crush, Crumble & Chomp!

MONSTER IN MAYHEM LAND

#57

» COMMODORE 64
» EPYX
» 1983

When I was still young I played this game on the Commodore 64 called *Rampage*, a popular coin-op that was converted by Activision. The idea of playing as a monster smashing up buildings seemed to excite me. At the time, I didn't know there was a similar game called *Crush, Crumble & Chomp!*. This game came to my attention while reading the second edition of *High Score!: The Illustrated History Of Electronic Games*.

CC&C! is similar to *Rampage* in some ways, but with slightly inferior graphics and sound. At the start, you choose from six pre-defined monsters or create your own, then the scenario, and finally the city you want to conquer. Since *CC&C!* only came out on 8-bit computer platforms, the game is controlled entirely with the keyboard. Actions are performed by pressing the appropriate key, and the actions you perform depend on what monster you play with and what abilities they have. There are a lot of keyboard commands to learn, and anyone who lost the manual will have to figure them out.

When you're out destroying everything, you must keep an eye on your health. Your monster must eat humans or it starve to death. Reaching fleeing humans is harder that you think, since there are a lot of key-presses in between. Also, enemy units will attack you, and you must deal with them before they take away all your health. The music you hear on the title screen is the same music that plays when you're on your last legs. From time to time, you will enter Berzerk mode, where your monster will do random things and you have no control over it. This mode is useful if you are faced with many enemies.

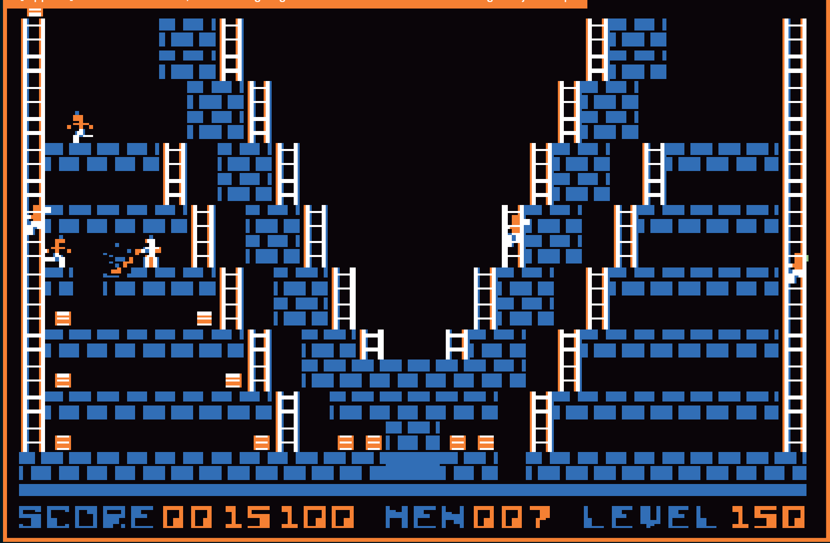
There are similar games out there such as *The Movie Monster Game* and *King Of The Monsters*, but it was *CC&C!* that started it all.

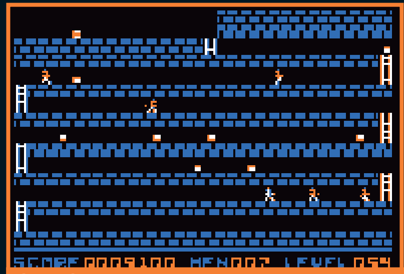
Lode Runner



As Lode Runner celebrates its 30th anniversary, Craig Grannell delves into the murky past of collecting videogame gold, unearthing the game's lost origins on the Commodore PET and discovering how it made the transition to the Apple II, arcades and beyond

» [Apple II] The last level. Man, our hero's going to be miffed when he realises the game just loops.





» [Apple II] Run away! Levels like this need a cunning plan, but fleeing is a decent alternative.

> I wasn't a gamer, nor am I today – that's the irony of the thing. It was all about the beauty of the algorithm
>
> JAMES BRATSANOS

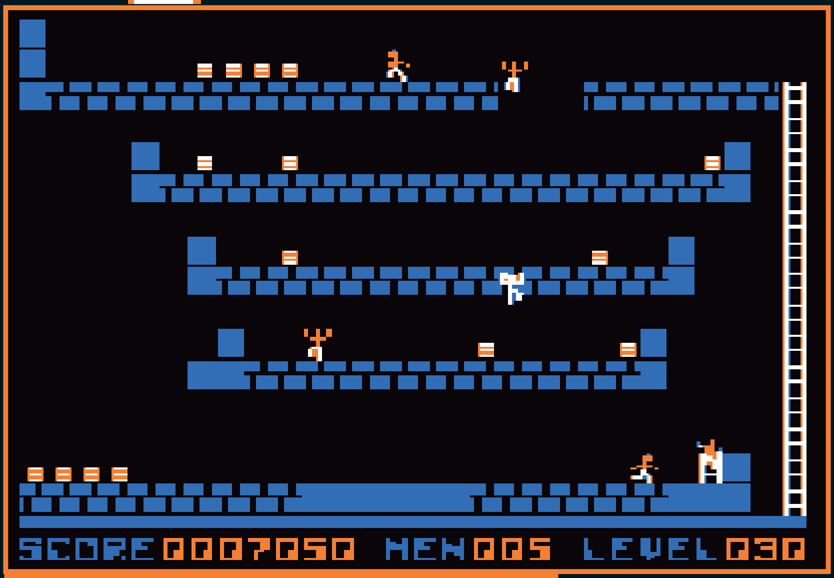
For me, it was really about the excitement of building an algorithm that could be thrown at any level, rather than pure gameplay. I wasn't a gamer, and nor am I today – that's the irony of the thing. It was all about the beauty of the algorithm." James Bratsanos is recalling his early programming days, holed up in high school with a Commodore PET no-one else was using. His surprisingly lenient maths teacher just let him get on with it, and James, having devoured a book on BASIC games, wanted to make something "a little more exotic."

A friend had returned from an arcade, excited about a game. "He didn't explain it well, and I took creative liberties and assumed I understood what he meant. So for certain elements, I completely misinterpreted it," laughs James. But with this vague direction, he devised a game based on you "trying to collect things while monsters were chasing you." To James, it was obvious to fashion levels from platforms and ladders, because "anti-gravity didn't seem that big back then," and it provided options to experiment with gravity and digging holes you could escape through or trap monsters in. But rather than digging directly down, the hero could only dig left or right.

"Part of that was if you're going to dig a hole, you can decide whether to jump into it or not, but if you could only dig directly below, you'd immediately fall into the hole and could only ever dig straight down," recalls James. "By digging left or right, there was strategy, and you could plan ahead, digging spaces two squares wide, jumping into that hole and then digging again."

Aficionados will recognise this concept as *Lode Runner*, but at this point in 1980 the game was called *Suicide*, had an '@' symbol for the hero, and juddered about on the Commodore PET. As James reiterates, he'd had no proper schooling in computers: "Because I had no idea how anything worked, I felt it was logical at the time to build an engine that could interpret a game level and then run a processing loop on the monsters."

In a sense, it's appropriate that this making-of is already a loop of sorts, because that's fundamentally what *Suicide* was. This loop was not only the most important aspect of James's creation, but it also informed every *Lode Runner* game that subsequently existed. "The absolute ▶



» [Apple II] When is a floor not a floor? When it's an annoying secret hole that gets you killed.

core was no pre-programmed anything. Just suck the level in, get the coordinates of everything – the monsters, gold to collect, the good guy – and run a loop on it. And the cool thing was the loop was constantly changing, depending on what the characters were doing." James recalls the system scanned for key hits to ascertain changes to the player's position, and then ran the algorithm for each monster, which would adjust their positions. "Because I was a naïve non-programmer trying to learn, I looked at everything like a human would, and figured you'd try to find the shortest route to your prey," he explains. An internal scoring engine looked at steps from a monster to the player in each direction, if reaching them was possible, and the lowest score won out. If there was no benefit in moving, the monster would stay put, because it couldn't get closer to you. "Really, I was doing recursion without knowing what recursion actually was, which was pretty cool," laughs James. "The beauty of the system was that it didn't matter how many monsters I had, because the underlying engine worked with them all. And since there was no specific logic tied to any one level, I could make endless levels and apply the logic to them. Later, I realised this was pretty novel for the time."

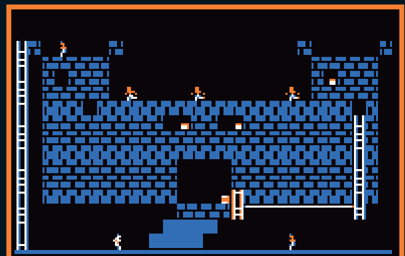
The manner in which James's system worked made the monsters seem to have intelligence – they'd often pause rather than home in on you. "And what made the game really interesting was they ran all this logic to determine if they were going to make this one move, left or right, but you could then jump off a platform and end up falling halfway down the screen. At that point, all bets were off, because your position changed so quickly," says James, adding that – as you might have guessed – "a lot of the fun for me was applying the logic to different levels and not necessarily playing the game!"

In 1981, after high-school, James went to the University of Washington. He took a Fortran class, became a teaching assistant and worked in the computer lab: "I became friends with a guy called Tracy Steinbeck, and we started rewriting *Suicide* for the VAX, and then Doug [Smith] got involved." The game was renamed *Kong*, possibly in tribute to the coincidentally similar *Donkey Kong*, and continued to evolve. "We got bored, thought 'What else can you do?', and started adding arrows, bombs, mines and shields," says James. But the biggest change was still to come, with the game's shift from spare-time computer-lab project to commercial concern.

"During summer, I'd drag my young nephew to campus and he played the game while I worked on it," remembers Doug. "He asked why I couldn't stick it on a floppy, take it home and put it on the Apple II. I had to explain that the VAX had no floppy drive and the game was in the wrong language, but he kept bugging me, so one weekend I rewrote it for the Apple II." Interestingly, Doug didn't own an Apple II nor even care for the machine: "I had no fondness for it, but I did have a natural knack for understanding computers and resolving problems with them." Fortunately, his then-roommate owned one and often asked for Doug's assistance, which drew him into understanding the machine and provided the means to craft the last *Lode Runner* prototype, *Miner*.

Recollections differ regarding this period of history – Doug remembers James lost interest, but James says: "I can see how Doug would interpret it that way, but I didn't know assembly and wasn't in a position to quit school to work on the Apple II. But Doug was gonna invest everything in writing the 6502 version before he ever had anyone to peddle it to." Subsequently, everything progressed rapidly. Newspapers from the time report Doug paid James $1,500 for the rights to his work, finished *Miner* and submitted it to Brøderbund. "I got my rejection letter, saying 'Thank you for submitting your game, but it does not fit within our product line'," says Doug, who then borrowed $800, bought a colour monitor and joystick, and set about improving the game to make it saleable.

Graphics and movement were overhauled, the latter shifting from the character-block movement the game used



» [Apple II] We'd admire the castle-like design of this level if it wasn't full of deadly guards.

A brief history of level editors

We look at some retro and not-so-retro games that allow you to play game designer

Pinball Construction Set

(C64, Apple II, Atari 800, Mac, PC, 1983)

The game that kicked off the construction craze on computers, Bill Budge's successful pinball table creator allowed players to select and position pinball furniture and even toy around with physics. Tables could then be saved to disk.



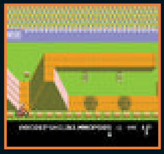
Wizard *(C64, 1984)*

An early 1984 platformer that saw players collecting keys to open doors (obviously), and became popular for its stage creator. So much so that an expansion pack/update of the game, *Ultimate Wizard*, was released two years later and included some 50 new stages (some fan-created).



Excitebike *(Arcade, NES, PC-88, 1984)*

Nintendo's earliest racing game let you create your own hilly tracks, set the number of laps, and pick and position obstacles with a simple on-rails editor. The only drawback was the second you turned your console off it was all for naught, unless you owned a Famicom Disk System and a data-writable disk copy of the game.



Adventure Construction Set

(C64, 1984)

First released on the C64, Stuart Smith's *ACD* was an early hit for Electronic Arts and was directly inspired by Bill Budge's *Pinball Construction Set*. You'll need a lot of patience with it, but you're able to create great tile-based dungeons.



Boulderdash Construction Kit

(Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Atari ST, Atari 8-bit, 1986)

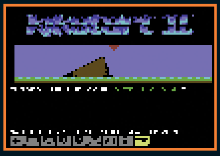
This was an amazingly comprehensive construction kit that enabled you to create all sorts of delicious headache-inducing problems for Rockford. It also shipped with *Boulderdash IV*.



Kikstart II – The Construction Set

(C64, CPC, Spectrum, Amiga, 1987)

More motorbike track designing, this time courtesy of Shaun Southern's *Kikstart II*. Visually, it was a notable step up from its predecessor, but the icing on this mud cake was its simple track editor. You could also save your work to a disk.



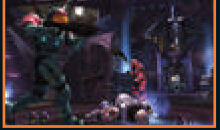
SEUCK *(C64, Amiga, ST, 1987)*

Or, to give it its complete name, *Shoot'Em-Up Construction Kit*. It did exactly what it said on its box. Created by Sensible Software, it gave blaster fans the tools and the engine needed to construct their very own space shooters. In addition to the editor, it included four example shooters made with the program to show versatility.



Halo 3 *(Xbox 360, 2007)*

Although it wasn't the first level editor to appear in a first-person shooter, *Halo 3*'s Forge is easily the best. Incredibly easy to use, it allows you to import (or remove) items and weapons into maps that already exist to create brand new environments for players to battle in.



LittleBigPlanet

(PS3, 2008)

Media Molecule's award winning PlayStation 3 game did a fantastic job of making level editing relevant for today's gamers. Head online for both *LittleBigPlanet* and its excellent sequel and you'll often find creations that are better than the ones that shipped in the actual game.



Minecraft *(PC, 2009)*

This is the most successful level editor of all time. The sandbox approach of *Minecraft* and the ability to create virtually anything the player likes has turned it into a massive success. The brainchild of Markos 'Notch' Persson, the power of word of mouth helped to drive *Minecraft*'s success, at least to begin with.

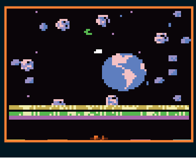


From Computer To Arcade

Five home videogames that made it to the arcades

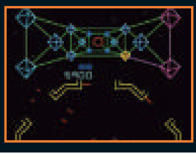
Astro Chase *(Exidy, 1982)*

As soon as its games were confirmed successes, First Star Software was approached by Exidy to gain the arcade rights. Taking a fairly easy option, the resulting arcade machines were essentially boxed Atari computers, with modifications to support an arcade-style joystick, buttons and coin drops.



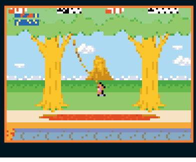
Cosmic Chasm *(Cinematronics, 1983)*

Originally created for the Vectrex by GCE, *Cosmic Chasm* was a year later taken to the arcades by Cinematronics. The game itself finds you on a mission to wreck a space station, through blowing up its tiny but deadly craft, finding your way to the reactor room and then letting rip. Touching anything is fatal…



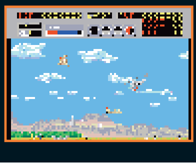
Pitfall II *(Activision/Sega, 1984)*

Based on David Crane's classic Activision games and reprogrammed for the arcades by Sega, *Pitfall II* has you controlling a cute, cartoonish Pitfall Harry through a cute, cartoonish jungle. The snag: all the cute, cartoonish beasties are out for your blood – even trees, which fling angry apples at your head.



Choplifter *(Sega, 1985)*

Like *Lode Runner*, *Choplifter* was first an Apple II classic. The game featured a daring pilot, attempting to rescue hostages being held in prisoner of war camps. Sega's arcade version expands on the original, which was a very streamlined production (one level, 64 hostages, three sorties), providing a level-based approach.



Tetris *(Atari, 1988)*

A few years after Alexey Pajitnov created his classic block-falling action-puzzler on the Electronika 60, the game found its way to the arcades, courtesy of Atari. The graphics unsubtly alluded to the game's Russian origins, and the R in the character set was playfully reversed at every opportunity.



▶ since its PET incarnation to smoother pixel-level motion. Controls were honed, enabling commands to be better cued, like in *Pac-Man*. "That was important—there was a margin of error and you could time it to execute when you got to the appropriate point," explains Doug. Despite a perfectionist streak, he wanted everything to be fluid versus overly precise, but details also mattered. While initially keen on animation assistance for the hero and enemies, no-one understood Doug's desire that humanoid characters not be 'treadmill': "I wanted to make sure when they put a foot down, it stayed fixed to that part of the ground." He subsequently created the graphics himself.

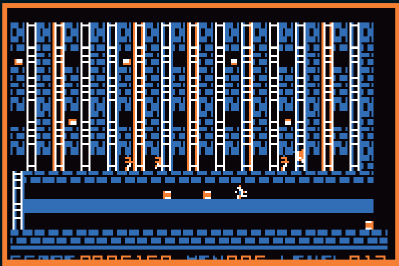
Further changes impacted the game, including a pre-level pause, awaiting player input before the enemy guards first moved. "*Lode Runner* was always intended to be a kind of strategy game, and I thought it would be good if you could pause, figure out a strategy and execute it," he says. But although Doug was the game's absolute director, some aspects were out of his hands. Having re-sent the improved game to various publishers, Brøderbund reconsidered, and Doug signed a contract, promising 150 levels. Lacking time to create them, they were farmed out to friends and neighbours; hundreds were supplied to the publisher on disk, with a utility enabling levels to be eliminated and ordered to suit.

When asked about the quirky guard AI and its surprising sophistication for the day, Doug laughs and suggests we're "maybe giving too much credit," because that too wasn't entirely his doing. "Back then, a lot of it was the luck of the process, realising there were quirks of the logic you could utilise." During testing, he realised you could 'force' enemy guards to collect gold on your behalf, and so "use them as a bridge to get to otherwise unobtainable behaviours". This opened up avenues for advanced level design, and, in a sense, followed James's lead, emphasising a system over hard-coded level-specific knowledge and seeing what happened. Doug even admits his penchant for optimisation almost ruined the game: "In all honesty, the logic ended up being kind of a fluke, even though it was integral to some puzzle-solving aspects. I did at one point refine the logic to be perfect, so guards would always find the shortest path to you, but that lost a lot of the quirky character. The game became too perfect. I spent a month on that and had to rip it all out and revert to an earlier version!"

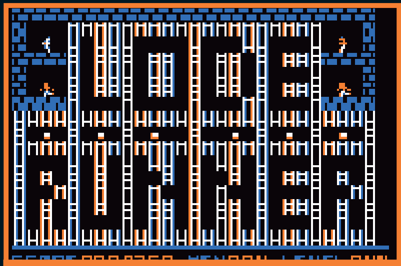
A rarity at the time, Brøderbund intentionally left the level editor in the shipping product, resulting in countless custom levels being created and submitted to the publisher. "We got so many we did a sequel, *Championship Lode Runner*, using the toughest levels," says Doug. "We removed the editor, so people couldn't peek at the levels, and there are some I spent weeks trying to solve! People had definitely taken advantage of and understood the quirkiness of the AI, and created levels that took a dedicated person to get through."

> **The logic ended up being kind of a fluke, even though it was integral** DOUGLAS SMITH

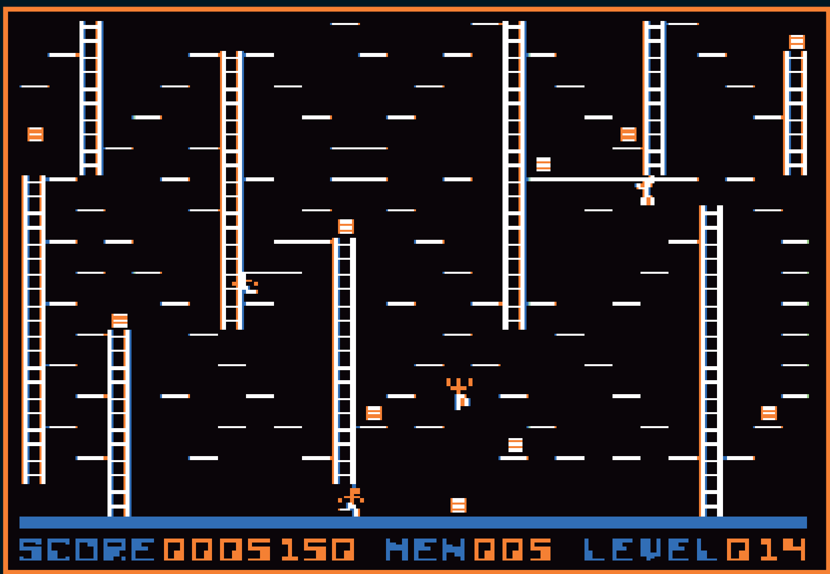
Although hands-on with some early *Lode Runner* ports, Doug says he felt "kind of played out". He became "more publicist than developer", mostly touring Japan, where the game had become popular, before leaving the industry to raise a family. A driving force behind *Lode Runner*'s Japanese popularity was then-Irem executive Scott Tsumura. "In 1983, our arcade team had many game fanatics playing home computer games, and *Lode Runner* was their favourite," he recalls. "I loved it too. It was unique because the runner couldn't jump or shoot, but could create temporary holes in the environment, trapping enemies and allowing the hero to escape." Through being "basic and fun, with a good combination of action, speed and imaginative puzzles," Scott considered *Lode Runner* ideally suited to Japanese tastes.



» [Apple II] It's lure-the-guards time.



» [Apple II] At level 44, do you really need this reminder…?



» [Apple II] No floors? Yeah, thanks for that. No, we're fine. Probably also: dead soon.

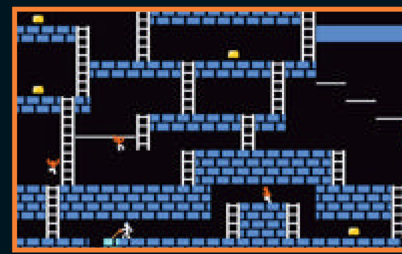
At the time, Scott recalls a clash between the demands of keeping people engrossed with arcade games versus the sales needed for home gaming: "Arcade developers had a bit of pride and regarded home-gaming developers as 'lower in rank', and so porting a PC game to the arcades was unimaginable." But Scott felt, with some twists, *Lode Runner* would buck the trend; a contract duly signed, Irem set about reworking the game. "Balance was given careful consideration, as the player should never fail unjustifiably. Difficulty of play and technique were factored into the game's learning curve. And score wasn't important on the PC – completing levels was the main objective – but scoring is important for status in the arcades," explains Scott. Hence, Irem introduced rewards for risks, such as trapping three enemies and running over them, and a bonus for collecting a shimmering piece of gold before the others.

Simultaneously, visuals and audio were overhauled. "The original's graphics were cool and stark, but the arcade's better resolution enabled us to use a warmer style that appealed to a larger demographic," says Scott, noting arcades were then full of colourful games competing for attention. "We also added enemies that changed every three levels, and each had unique animations. For the audio, many new samples were created, and, after much discussion, we used a sound from Irem's *10 Yard Fight* for blasting, the game's most important action!"

Along with starting its successful run in the arcades, Scott helped *Lode Runner* to various home systems, sometimes bringing Doug back on board. "The world evolves, and the game must evolve to continue being challenging and new, but it must also retain the original's premise and structure," thinks Scott on how *Lode Runner* games are approached. He regrets the odd deviation – "The N64 version, although an interesting puzzle creation with complex 3D paths, lost some of the original *Lode Runner* magic" – but is proud of the XBLA release, which he reckons "plays like it was born of the original, but has many new game modes and feels contemporary."

Turning to the game's creators, Doug Smith blushes a little when we ask how it feels to have launched such a long-running, well-loved series: "It was a shock—a Cinderella story. But I think I was just lucky at the right time, in the right era, with the right product." We suggest it takes more than luck to succeed, and Doug modestly states "the biggest thing *Lode Runner* ever had going for it is that it was a very simple game, and so it was adaptable."

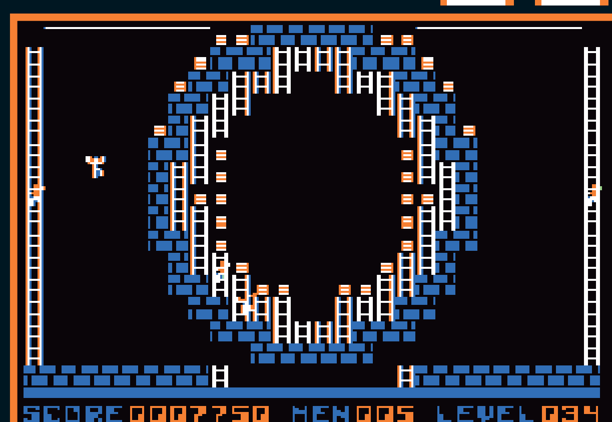
As for James, often the forgotten figure in the *Lode Runner* story, he says it's very exciting to have started the ball rolling, thanks his maths teacher for allowing him time on the PET, and graciously acknowledges Doug's dedication. "I like to think some of my creative juices remain in *Lode Runner*, but hats off to Doug for having the wherewithal for putting everything on hold and not taking no for an answer. He had perseverance and belief, and I respect him immensely for that, because at that time in life, few people would have had the diligence. Basically, he was a college student who worked through who knows how many all-nighters. I think that's a good example for young kids today."



Lode Runner Goes Mobile

Lode Runner Classic brings back the original game for mobile devices

Lode Runner Classic brings the Apple II original to mobile touchscreen platforms. Tozai co-founder Scott Tsumura calls it a "tribute to the original 1983 release," including similar graphics, AI and level design, but with new features, such as achievements, leaderboards and two game modes: expedition and time attack, for long and short play sessions, respectively. "It's a nice opportunity for us to show off the classic gameplay mechanic to a new generation," continues Scott, who reckons today's games can be "shrouded, hidden in decorative layers." He believes the core *Lode Runner* is beautiful, and he's proud to release an 'undecorated' version. One possible snag: touch controls, which he admits "present a challenge for games designed around keyboards and joysticks". But Tozai has implemented alternative input methods: a D-pad; accelerometer controls for Android and iOS; and a system that divides screen edges into invisible buttons for movement.

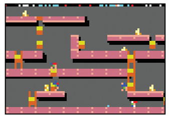


» [Apple II] Level 34. One look and our hero thought better of it and tried plummeting to his doom.

The History of Lode Runner

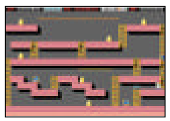
There have been a lot of Lode Runner games in the past thirty years. Don't believe us? Then check this little lot out…

LODE RUNNER



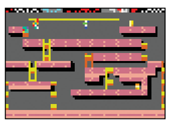
- 1984
- Arcade ■ Irem
- Arcade conversion (but in the opposite sense) by Irem that featured sci-fi theme, levels that were more compact, and new gameplay mechanics (such as time bonuses).

LODE RUNNER – THE BUNGELING STRIKES BACK



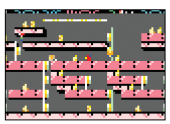
- 1984
- Arcade ■ Irem
- This was a very swift sequel from Irem that featured 30 stages, 10 based on the original stage set and 20 new stages to complete. It continued the sci-fi theme found in the original arcade game.

LODE RUNNER – GOLDEN LABYRINTH



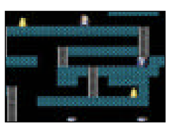
- 1985
- Arcade ■ Irem
- Yes another arcade sequel by Irem. Like *The Bungeling* it continued with a science fiction theme and featured 30 stages – some new, some based on the original level set.

LODE RUNNER – TEIKOKU KARANO DASSHATSU



- 1986
- Arcade ■ Irem
- This fourth arcade featured 30 stages (some based on the original set) introduced a multiplayer mode, in which players competed on the same stage simultaneously.

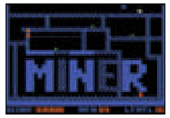
SUPER LODE RUNNER



- 1987
- FDS, MSX ■ Irem
- Home release by Irem that has an obvious conversion feel to its arcade series, it featured 55 single-player stages, 15 co-op, and a level editor. A very fine effort that's worth tracking down.

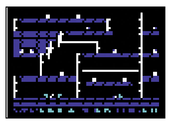
IREM

MINER



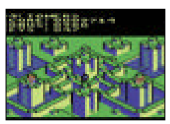
- 1982
- Apple II ■ Douglas E. Smith
- An early ASCII platformer by Doug E Smith, inspired by *Space Panic*, later received an updated version for the Apple II titled *Miner*. It is widely seen as a precursor to *Lode Runner*.

PROFESSIONAL LODE RUNNER



- 1985
- C64 ■ Dodosoft
- Similar in concept to *Championship Lode Runner* (although it can't really be considered to be a port), *Professional* was packed with all new taxing stages to tear your hair out to.

LODE RUNNER'S RESCUE



- 1985
- C64 ■ Synapse Software
- Isometric collect-and-avoid-'em-up in the style of Atari's *Crystal Castles* (like you couldn't tell from looking). You played Lode Runner's daughter on a mission to rescue her pops from the Bungeling Empire.

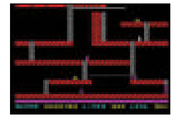
HANDHELD

LODE RUNNER – THE LEGEND RETURNS



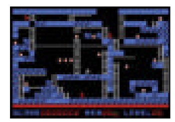
- 1994
- Various ■ Presage Software
- A remake of the original that introduced several new devices and traps that impacted the standard gameplay, including stages cast in darkness with visibility provided by torchlight.

LODE RUNNER



- 1983
- Various ■ Douglas E. Smith
- The first commercial release for the series was published by Broderbund. It featured 150 stages, was notoriously tough and was notable for being one of earliest games to feature a level editor.

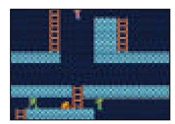
LODE RUNNER II



- 1983
- MSX ■ Douglas E. Smith
- *Lode Runner II* was a MSX exclusive which featured and impressive 50 levels. 22 of the stages were based on the original game, while the others were brand new stages. An enjoyable sequel.

HUDSON

LODE RUNNER – LOST LABYRINTH



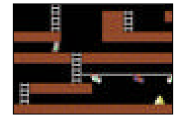
- 1990
- PC Engine, Turbografx 16
- Pack-In-Video
- Loose conversion of the original (contains all 150 levels), but gives the player sprite and enemy sprites a fresh lick of paint.

LODE RUNNER TWIN



- 1994
- Super Famicom ■ T&E Soft
- Colourful sequel with cartoony visuals and pseudo-3D levels, it was only released in Japan and is notable for being the first game in the series to have an actual story mode. Worth investigating.

LODE RUNNER



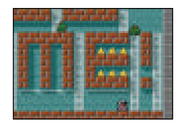
- 1984
- NES ■ Hudson Soft
- Written by Hudson Soft, this was the first console release for the *Lode Runner* franchise. It featured *Bomberman* enemies and was the first game in the series to feature zoomed-in stages that scrolled.

CHAMPIONSHIP LODE RUNNER



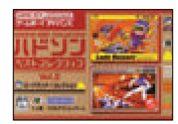
- 1984
- Various
- Broderbund / Hudson Soft (NES)
- 50 taxing stages designed by fans and no level editor, this challenging sequel was designed to test the logic and dexterity of gold-grabbing pros.

BATTLE LODE RUNNER



- 1993
- PC Engine, Virtual Console
- Hudson Soft
- Sequel from Hudson that introduced a *Bomberman*-style 'battle' mode, in which up to five players compete against each other across different game modes.

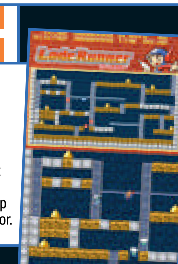
HUDSON BEST COLLECTION VOL 2: LODE RUNNER COLLECTION



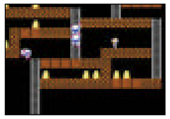
- 2005
- GBA
- Hudson Soft
- GBA compilation pack that only saw release in Japan, it included the original NES versions of *Lode Runner* and *Championship Lode Runner*.

LODE RUNNER DS

- 2006
- Nintendo DS
- Hudson Soft
- A mesh port of the two NES games, it makes good use of the handheld's dual screens to offer both zoomed-in and map viewpoints. Also comes with a level editor.

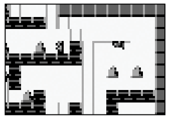


SUPER LODE RUNNER II



- 1987
- FDS
- Irem
- Irem continued to milk the *Lode Runner* franchise with yet another game. This particular sequel featured 30 single player stages, the same number of multiplayer levels and a level editor.

HYPER LODE RUNNER



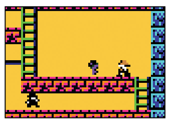
- 1989
- GameBoy
- Bandai
- First portable entry for the series, and a launch game for the Game Boy in Japan, it added a key and door mechanic to the traditional gameplay. Perfect for portable play.

LODE RUNNER KEYCHAIN



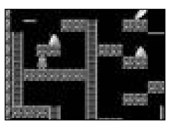
- 1997
- N/A
- Xing Entertainment
- LCD handheld by XING Entertainment, it featured a choice of two different *Lode Runner* games and a level creator, amazingly. We'd love to say the level editor is incredible, but we've never seen it in the wilds.

LODE RUNNER DOMUDOMU DAN NO YABOU



- 2000
- Game Boy Color
- Xing Entertianment
- *Domu* had cartoony visuals, new stages, two game modes (including a story mode), zoomed-in visuals and was the first *Lode Runner* to feature a hub world. The only *Lode Runner* on Game Boy Color.

LODE RUNNER: WONDERSWAN



- 2000
- Wonderswan
- Banpresto
- Released for Bandai's monochromatic edition of its Wonderswan, this sequel had two playable heroes and an outer space anime theme. There's an additional bonus level if you can find the items to activate it.

LODE RUNNER



- 2002
- GBA
- Success
- Coded by Success, *Lode Runner* offered a more puzzle-style take on the traditional *LR* gameplay and let players select between two views. It featured 100 levels and a level editor.

LODE RUNNER ONLINE: THE MAD MONKS' REVENGE



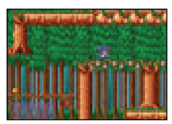
- 1995
- Various
- Presage Software
- This is an impressive sequel to *The Legend Returns*, it added online functionality, non-linear stages, plus a selection of new devices over those the original introduced.

LODE RUNNER 3-D



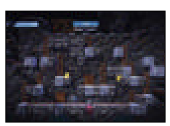
- 1999
- N64
- Big Bang Software
- Featured a colossal 156 stages (20 secret bonus stages to find), true 3-D visuals and a new blasting mechanic. It also introduced bosses to the mix, making it an interesting addition to the series.

POWER LODE RUNNER



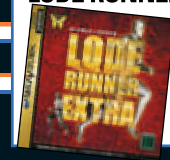
- 1999
- Super Famicom
- Atelier Software
- Japan-only sequel with a cartoony art style (Lode Runner is an anthropomorphic critter), a zoomed-in perspective and themed worlds, the most cutesy platformer feeling entry in the series.

LODE RUNNER



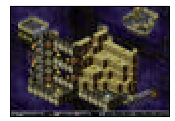
- 2009
- XBLA
- Tozai Games/SouthEnd Interactive
- Solid XBLA update boasting over 200 levels and nice hi-res 3D graphics. It also came with a level editor that allowed you to create and share with others users online. A solid addition to the franchise.

LODE RUNNER EXTRA



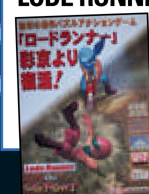
- 1997
- Sega Saturn, PlayStation
- PATRA (Saturn), Natsume (PlayStation)
- Late *The Legend Returns* port for PlayStation and Saturn that featured 40 less stages than the original computer version. The missing ones weren't interesting enough.

LODE RUNNER 2



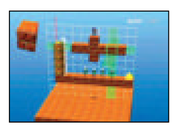
- 1998
- Windows, Mac
- GT Interactive
- An isometric sequel with an eye-meltingly bright art style, it's notable for being the first game in the series to be in 3D and having enemies with distinctive AI. It also includes a death match mode.

LODE RUNNER – THE DIG FIGHT



- 2000
- Arcade
- Psikyo
- Yes another arcade sequel, this time with a focus on head to head gameplay, and replaced lives with a ticking down time limit that players had to top up to stay in the game. It was another Japanese exclusive for the series.

CUBIC LODE RUNNER



- 2003
- GameCube, PS2
- Hudson Soft
- Released on Hudson Soft's budget label, it applied the standard *Lode Runner* gameplay to cubic playing fields. It also featured the original NES port as an unlockable extra.

MOBILE

LODE RUNNER MOBILE



- 2004
- Mobile phones
- FT Mobile
- Updated graphics and 60 levels, which can be played in any order, to beat in this Java constructed sequel by Hudson Soft. Created by FT Mobile it went on to win IGN's Editor's Choice award.

LODE RUNNER DELUXE



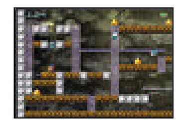
- 2006
- Mobile phones
- Hudson Soft
- An early ASCII platformer by Doug E Smith, inspired by *Space Panic*, later received an updated version for the Apple II titled *Miner*. It is widely seen as a precursor to *Lode Runner*.

LODE RUNNER MOBILE



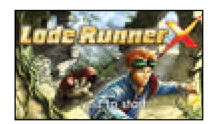
- 2008
- Mobile phones
- Hudson Soft
- Another mobile offering by Hudson Soft, this sequel featured 80 levels and a level editor. It's another fun take on the series, but suffers slightly due to the reliance of keybutton controls.

LODE RUNNER IOS



- 2008
- Mobile phones
- Hudson Soft
- Mode laden update for Apple devices, the most notable new mode was 'Gold Rush', which saw players racing to collect gold piles inside stages that auto scrolled downwards.

LODE RUNNER X



- 2012
- Mobile phones
- Tozai Games/SouthEnd Interactive
- Essentially the single-player stages, puzzles screens and components from the XBLA release, it was released on Sony's Xperia Play and Android devices.

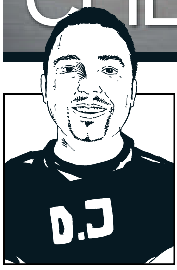
LODE RUNNER CLASSIC



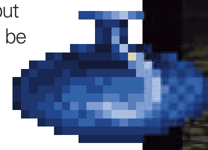
- 2012
- Mobile phones
- Tozai Games/Studio Voltz
- A remastering of the 1983 classic with two game modes, Time Attack and Expedition, a level select and online functionality, but sadly no level editor.

CLASSIC GAMING FOR UNDER A FIVER

CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learnt about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you really want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune to procure, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than five English pounds…



STONEKEEP





» [PC] It looks cheesy now, but *Stonekeep*'s FMV intro was amazingly impressive when it appeared in 1995.

INFO

- » **SYSTEM:** PC
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **PUBLISHER:** INTERPLAY ENTERTAINMENT
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

When FTL Games released *Dungeon Master* in 1987 they caused rival developers to unleash a torrent of copycat clones, all eager to cash in on the RPG's astonishing success. Interplay's *Stonekeep* was one such example and something of a cautionary tale to boot, grandly reaching for the stars and failing to grasp them.

Stonekeep was originally conceived by just two developers, Michael Quarles and actor Peter Oliphant. Known as *Brian's Dungeon* – a tribute to Interplay's Brian Fargo – it was designed to be completed in just nine months for a cost of $50,000. By the time *Stonekeep* came out, its team had swollen to 200 people, while the price had climbed to $5 million. The project itself took a lengthy five years, meaning many of its clever ideas weren't as impactful. Peter Oliphant himself left in the fourth year of development, unhappy with the lengthy time the game was taking to finish.

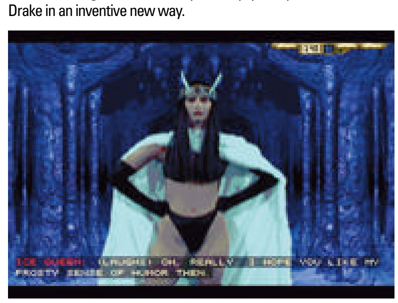
While computer technology was changing quickly during *Stonekeep*'s development, elements of it still impressed upon its release. Its intro was absolutely stunning at the time, with actors going about their business before being terrorised by *Stonekeep*'s main villain, Khull-Khuum the Shadowking. Costing just under $500,000, the sequence was insanely expensive, but certainly memorable, showing just what was capable on CD-ROM-based technology.







» [PC] The Magic Mirror allows you to equip weapons and feed Drake in an inventive new way.



» [PC] FMV was used throughout, *Stonekeep*, giving the game a pleasing campness that curbed its overtly serious tone.

Stonekeep's gameplay was never as striking as its visuals, but it nonetheless featured plenty of clever ideas. One of the best was the Magic Scroll, which enabled protagonist Drake to store as many different items as he could find. Some baulked at the ease with which items could be stored, but it dispensed with the boring micro management found in similar adventures. The Magic Mirror was another cool device that featured an image of Drake and let you place items on him in order to heal, feed or equip him.

Stonekeep also boasted an impressively comprehensive spell system based around four runes that allowed you to create offensive and defensive spells. It was also possible to attack different body parts of enemies, depending on where your mouse touched the screen.

Stonekeep was certainly clunky in both its execution and its clichéd storytelling, but it still proved to be an entertaining adventure, even if it never lived up to its original grand promises. This in part is thanks to the hilarious use of FMV that is used throughout the game, while many of the digitised enemies also add to the game's theatrical campness. Currently available to buy from www.gog.com, *Stonekeep* remains an enjoyable romp, that could have been a genuinely important addition to the genre if it hadn't arrived so late in the day.

BEATEN TO IT Games that stole Stonekeep's thunder

Dungeon Master 1987



Stunning RPG from FTL Games, which featured lots of clever mechanics like torches that ran out over time, and heroes who would slowly starve if they weren't regularly fed.

Bloodwych 1989



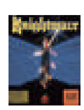
This impressive effort was released on numerous 8 and 16-bit systems. While very similar to *Dungeon Master*, it was notable for allowing two-players to adventure on one computer or TV screen.

Eye Of The Beholder 1990



A successful RPG that combined the distinctive 3D approach of *Dungeon Master* with the *Dungeons & Dragons* universe, using a streamlined version of *Dungeon Master*'s combat.

Knightmare 1991



Excellent adaptation of the hit children's TV show, which was built using the Captive engine. It was notable at the time for its great soundtrack, which required 1MB of memory.

Lands Of Lore 1993



After leaving the *D&D* licence behind, Westwood studios returned with another epic RPG, which featured the voice of Patrick Stewart as King Richard on the CD-ROM version of the game.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Imagitec Design

Imagitec Design is the biggest software house you have never heard of. Throughout the Eighties and Nineties it worked on some of the biggest games in the business and gained a reputation as the go-to place for multi-format conversions, Kieren Hawken brings us its story

Dewsbury, West Yorkshire might not seem the obvious place to open a game studio but in 1986 Martin Hooley and James North-Hearn did just that.

Dewsbury became prominent in the 19th Century as a mill town and so it seems only right that the original home of Imagitec Design was a converted mill. In these early years Martin had a team of around 20 staff, many of which he recruited personally to help set up its development systems. "In the early days I recruited and imported a number of crack hacking teams, one of these was The Judges, the legendary Dutch Hackers," Martin says.

As Imagitec began to write its own development systems, porting games across several platforms became much easier, as Martin explains. "Our porting skills grew quickly as we built our own development solutions based on the Atari ST. Joolz [Julian Alden-Salter] wrote most of the tools." Imagitec actually became the first ever UK developer to work with Electronic Arts when it converted *Ferrari Formula One* from the Amiga to the other popular home computers of the time. Imagitec really cut its teeth on some of these early ports, with other efforts including a conversion of *Ultima* from the Apple II to the C64 (this code was later used for the NES version) and *Times Of Lore* from the C64 to multiple formats. This was the first game written by *Wing Commander*'s Chris Roberts.

Imagitec worked with another big name, as Martin tells us. "We did a lot of work for Apple direct, converting a lot of the Gremlin titles to its Macs, using Power VR graphic boards called the Gazelle," adding this interesting snippet, "this was the same chipset as the iPhone, we even worked on its failed Pippin console." This led to the start of a long-standing relationship with Gremlin Graphics that would see Imagitec not only producing original titles for Gremlin, but also handling conversions of games to other platforms.

Imagitec's first two games for Gremlin were *Blood Valley* and *Butcher Hill*, both of which were released for the Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad CPC, with the latter also seeing conversions to the Amiga and Atari ST. Both games received a lukewarm reception, but they did show that Imagitec could work with multiple platforms at one time. "It was the long-standing relationship with Gremlin that led us to become one of the best trans-coding shops that there was, we could port anything to anything," Martin proudly tells us.

Rapid Growth

With the reputation of Imagitec quickly growing it was time to hire more staff and in 1989 the company grew massively in size. One of these new employees was Kristi Louise Herd, who went on to become a lead graphic artist for the company, and she still remembers it all very clearly… "I was at college and I had dabbled with computer graphics and a bit of code. My

INSTANT EXPERT

Imagitec Design's first HQ was an old converted mill in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire.

It had a special relationship with Gremlin for many years before being bought out by them.

Imagitec once shared a building with a brothel and saw regular visits from the vice squad.

Its biggest hit was *The Humans*, which appeared on 12 different formats and had several sequels.

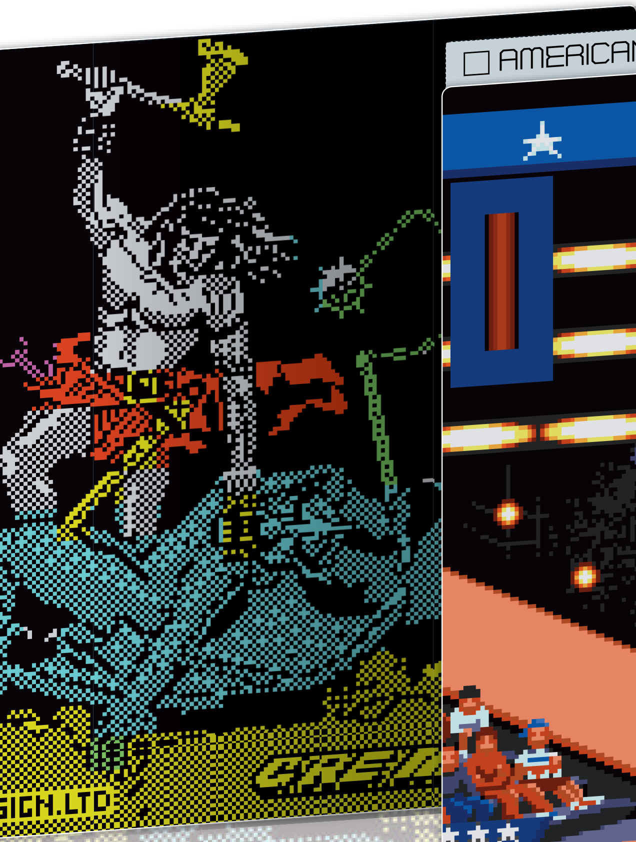
Imagitec never published any of its own games but developed for some of the biggest names in the business such as Gremlin, Atari, GameTek, Mindscape and Virgin.

It was also a music studio and produced both the in-game music and soundtrack CD for the classic Jeff Minter trip-fest *Tempest 2000*.

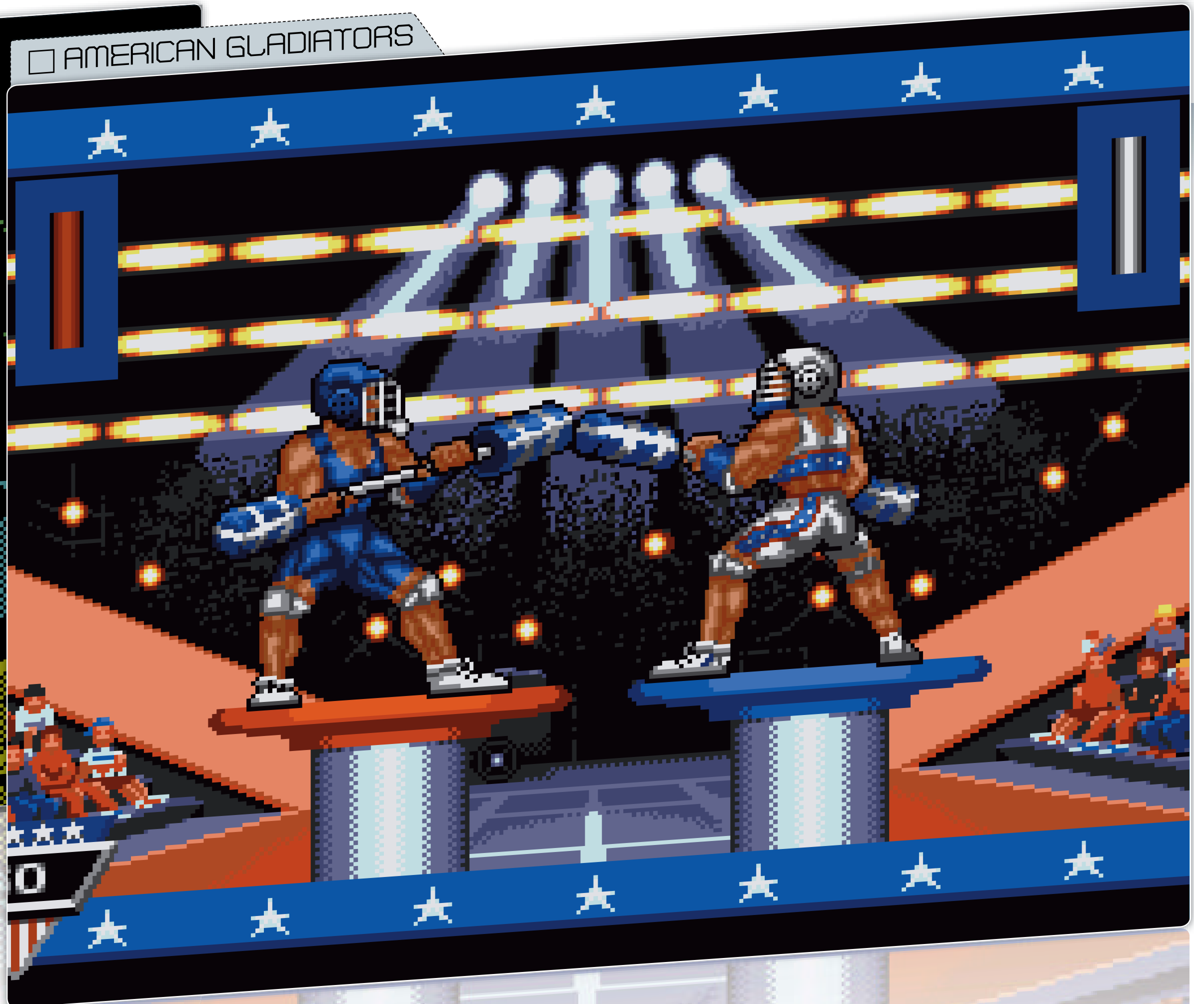
***Viking Child* was** originally titled *Prophecy 1: The Viking Child* but never received any sequels!

It developed a host of games based on popular TV shows such as *Wheel Of Fortune*, *Jeopardy*, *TNN Fishing* and *American Gladiators*.

After DMA Design struggled with the development of the original *Grand Theft Auto* game on the PlayStation it was turned over to Imagitec for completion.



AMERICAN GLADIATORS



> "The effective boss of Atari was Sam Tramiel, who was a really good bloke, the CTO was his brother Leonard – he was a different matter"
>
> MARTIN HOOLEY

main focus was to qualify as a professional graphic designer and I would think about a job when I graduated. To gain some experience, I volunteered my services to Dewsbury Technical College producing booklets using Desktop Publishing. It was a cool thing to do as it gave me an opportunity to experiment with drawing graphics on a computer."

It was at this point her tutor spoke to her about a job opportunity she might be interested in. "He said that a mate of his ran a small gaming company and he was looking for artists, why not give him a call." That company of course was of course Imagitec Design and after she took a portfolio of work to an interview with Martin, she was offered a job on the spot.

Kristi's first work for the company was on the C64 and included the smash hit *Fiendish Freddy's Big Top O' Fun* for Mindscape. She has great memories of working with the C64, telling us, "I took to the C64 without a hitch. At my interview I had to draw with a joystick using Koala Painter on the C64. It took a while to get used to drawing with double pixels, but I thought it was pretty awesome. I had some difficult games to do graphics for, but the C64 handled the task without a problem." Kristi also feels her work with the C64 put her in good position to handle other machines, revealing "working with the C64 made me a more competent artist because of the technical difficulties to overcome. It was always a challenge to get something different going on the C64, but I think as an artist, I achieved that."

Barry Leitch joined Imagitec in 1988 as audio director and was a huge part of the company's growth. He worked with the programmers to create custom sound drivers for all the major machines, enabling them to quickly create and convert music for all manner of platforms. "I had worked with the programmers to unify the data structure for the music drivers," Barry tells us. "The C64 was by far the most advanced music driver we had at the time, as everyone was literally trying to squeeze every ounce out of C64 audio. Being able to utilise even just the note data and recreate the instruments for the other target platforms made life *so* much easier."

Barry then revealed more about the conversion process, revealing, "I'd write the Amiga music first as a four-channel wave table. Having a background in C64 audio was key to how the audio was composed and I was careful to only do stuff that I could replicate on other systems."

Barry thinks that many other studios were too ambitious with what they tried to do, telling us that "some people used big speech samples or other sounds that would never be able to be replicated on lesser platforms. While this gave them an edge on the Amiga, it sounded pish on every other platform."

Once the Amiga version was done Barry would then make the three-channel versions. "I reduced the polyphony using arpeggios, or by sneaking some percussion ▶

BY THE NUMBERS

20 The number of different systems Imagitec Design developed games for.

5 Million dollars is how much money the company turned over in 1995.

3 How many different buildings Imagitec lived in during their existence.

1 Hour was the deadline they were once given to produce a music conversion (they did it).

19 All of the games they produced for Atari had to be sent over to Sunnyvale using a 19k modem, some files were over 2MB in size!

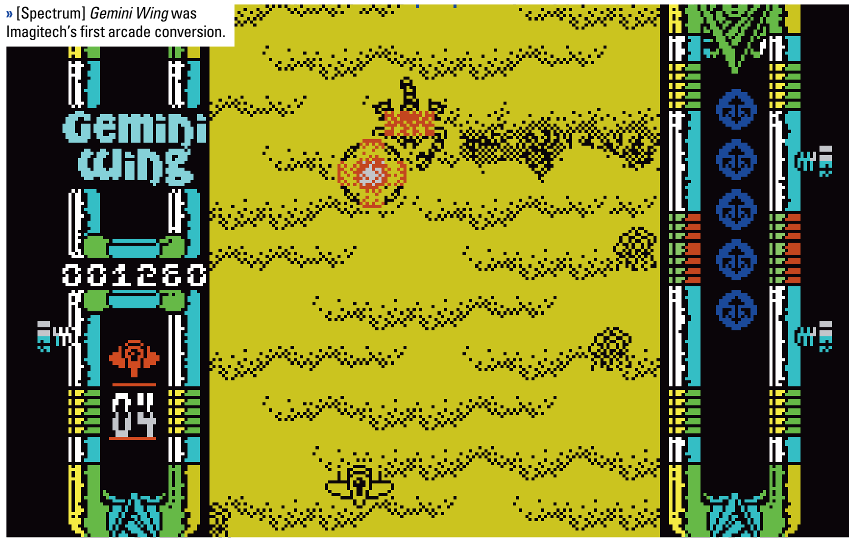
40 Minutes was the amount of time the employees were given for lunch, with one hour on a Friday.

4 Number of games in *The Humans* series.

16 How many hours they often worked when trying to complete a game.



» Barry Leitch and Julian Alden-Salter looking dapper on Imagitec prom night!



» [Spectrum] *Gemini Wing* was Imagitech's first arcade conversion.

into the bass line tracks. Once that was done it was really just a matter of recreating the instruments for the different platforms to take advantage of any special hardware capabilities and TADA! You had the music across a bunch of platforms in a matter of minutes." Barry thinks that all this work really gave them the edge over other studios of the time. "As we had all those music drivers, it made us a great alternative for clients to use instead of David Whittaker. A lot of the conversion work came from the partnerships we had with other companies at the time, Gremlin, Electronic Arts, Microprose, Virgin etc."

Efficiency also played a big part in Imagitec's success, with Barry proclaiming: "We were fast, really fast! For one example, I think it was *Supremacy* on the PC, I was literally given a cassette tape of the music at 4pm on a Friday afternoon and told if I had it done by 5pm they could use it, if not the game would ship without music, and I did it!" Another memory revolved around a trip to Gremlin. "I was doing *Impossamole* for the TurboGrafx 16, all the music and the sound driver was written in five days down in Sheffield. *Top Gear* for the SNES was a similar affair with stuff being thrown together under ridiculously tight time-frames."

Barry's favourite machine to work with was the Amiga and he attributes much of his success to Commodore's machine. "When it came to the Amiga, Gremlin were making amazing games. I was really lucky to be in the position to do these games, suddenly the stars aligned and I stopped writing music that sucked! *Lotus 2, Utopia, Harlequin* and *Hero Quest* were all great melodies." When compared to the other famous computer musicians of the time Barry commented "It didn't hurt that Richard Joseph was fairly exclusive at the time. Hubbard, Galway and Whittaker had all headed to the States and Daglish had vanished, so for a brief time I felt like I was the king of the castle!"

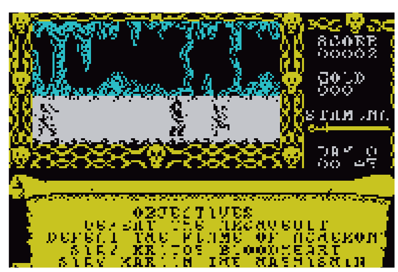
Burning The Candle

When it comes to the glory years of Imagitec Design in the late Eighties and early Nineties, the stories are endless. It regularly burned the candle at both ends, working until the early hours of the morning and often slept in the office. Many of them even had their own bedrooms and apart from numerous jaunts to the local pub, Imagitec was their life. Kristi looks back on how stressful those years in the industry were, and reveals, "Those of us who worked in the industry around [that time] belong to a unique breed. It was challenging, it was exciting, we felt and acted like rock stars, but lived like paupers! There was no money and no glamour, but we produced games that are still talked about and will remain classics."

Mark Fisher was a programmer at Imagitec and clearly remembers working all



» [Amiga] *Combo Racer* proved to be an interesting take on the racing genre.



» [Spectrum] *Blood Valley* was the first game programmed by Imagitec Design for the 8-bit micros.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Martin Hooley
Martin was the MD of Imagitec Design throughout the company's existence and saw them through all their highs and lows. After guiding the company through a successful takeover by Gremlin he went on to form a new company called Blue Monkey studios in Las Vegas where he specialises in digital animation. They have also produced videogames for all major formats.



Julian Alden-Salter
When he was at Imagitec, Julian worked as a lead game designer and as the head of 68000 development where he took charge of many key products. After leaving the company in 1992 he went on to work at Origin up until the takeover by EA, then Argonaut where he worked on the *Croc* games. This was followed up by a period at DDI where he produced titles based on the popular Tonka toys. Eclipse and Blitz Games also made use of his services before he chose to leave the games industry behind and he now programs embedded systems for a small private company.



Kristi Louise Herd
Kristi was one of the few female graphic artists working in the games industry during the Nineties. In fact she was the only female working at Imagitec, aside from the secretary. As the lead graphic artist, she was responsible for many of Imagitec's biggest productions including *Daemonsgate* and *Fiendish Freddy's Big Top O' Fun.* After leaving Imagitec she worked for both Attention To Detail, where she worked on *Blue Lightning* for the Jaguar, and then Take 2 Interactive. After spending some time as a web developer and retail manager, she is now a research administrator but her new passion is photography.

Barry Leitch
As Imagitec's audio director Barry was the key man behind the success of their own music studio that quickly gained a reputation as one of the best in the business. After leaving Imagitec, he went on to perform similar roles at Ocean Software, Origin, Boss Game Studios and Atari Games. Four years followed at Fisher Price where he was in charge of music production for their various products. Barry now runs his own music studios where he works on everything from ring tones and game music to movie sound effects.








» There was a rather large queue for the toilet after Imagitec curry night.

night. "At one point I was living in the mill, I had a nice double bed set up on the top floor in a little room, it may have been the spare parts room. We used to play a game at night where we would move as slowly as possible to see if we could outwit the IR sensors." Coder Andrew Seed was no stranger to late nights either, telling us, "I can remember one late night where I was stuck in the end room with my headphones on. I get to the end of the CD and I hear this car alarm going off and thinking 'For fuck's sake, shut up!' I listen to the next CD and I could still hear it but I just carried on. It's time to head home to bed and as I approach the reception the noise is getting louder. It was the building alarm, somebody must have armed it and not realised I was the last person in the building!"

Barry was one of the main protagonists when it came to late night working but for him it was all worth it. "My absolute favourite moment was when we were crunching on *Zone Warrior*, he continues. "It was 2.30am in the office and I'd just finished writing the high score table music, a fairly mellow piece with these nice choir pads and a break beat. I had the music cranked and was totally in the 'zone'. The other guys in the office slowly trickled in and were just hanging out in my office chilling listening to it." A misty-eyed Barry then recalls, "They say when you create something, the reward comes when someone 'gets it'. Whether it's music, art, writing, etc, it's when someone else makes that emotional connection with what you created. Usually with game music, the only feedback you'd get was 'It sucks, do something else' or a magazine game review six months later that said 'Yeah, that's good'. But these guys who'd all been working on the game 16 hours a day for months on end all just filtered in slowly and just sat there digging it, they totally got it, it was fucking beautiful."

It wasn't all work and no play though, as going to the pub, getting drunk and having fun was also a big part of the Imagitec ethos. Barry gives us a little insight into the Imagitec days. "As someone who worked there once wrote – we worked hard, we played harder, and we celebrated *every* event. It was very much the frat house culture, combined with poverty, alcoholism, unheard-of passion, violence and of course, blood, sweat and tears. Having said that though, it was absolutely the best place in the world to be. We could do anything, we created a videogame industry."

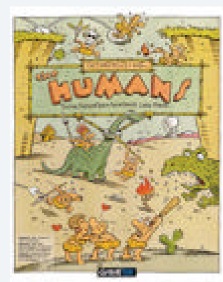
Julian Alden-Salter recalls some of the crazier moments at the company. "One time we tried to make explosives and flooded the kitchen with ammonia, and the 'flame throwers' were fashioned out of lighter fluid and coat hangers. Mental times." Kristi has her share of great memories too, revealing, "I remember one of the artists, Jolly, brought his replica pistol into work and started shooting rounds off upstairs. I thought I was going to get shot! We also covered a programmer's car with shaving foam just because he annoyed us all so much. He was so angry but it was all worth it. We had great times at Imagitec. If I could have those days again I would!"

One particularly memorable highlight for many of the staff was a trip to CES in Chicago in 1990. "We couldn't afford ▶

"I was literally given a cassette tape of the music at 4pm on a Friday afternoon and told if I had it done by 5pm they could use it"

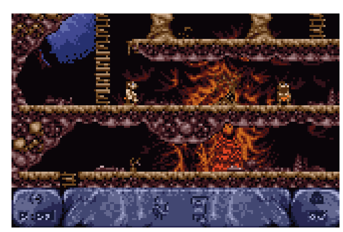
BARRY LEITCH

BEING HUMAN



Imagitec's biggest hit was *The Humans*, a game that saw release on 13 different platforms from the Game Boy to the 3DO. Atari published versions for the Falcon and Jaguar, where the game was renamed *Evolution: Dino Dudes*, and a Lynx version called *Dinolympics*. GameTek published all of the other versions of the game and its two sequels. Obviously inspired by DMA Design's *Lemmings*, Psygnosis were actually getting ready to sue Imagitec when the game was first previewed in the magazine of the time. However, when it was finally released the game actually contained many original elements of its own. The idea of the game is to guide your prehistoric humans through a series of taxing levels, evolving them as you go. You need to help them invent fire and the wheel as well as teaching them to use their surroundings to their advantage. Your humans must avoid being eaten by hungry dinosaurs and learn to work as a team if you are going to reach your goal. *The Humans* was very well received by the press at the time, spawned two sequels and is set to be revived for mobile devices very soon.





TIMELINE

1985 IMAGITEC DESIGN IS FIRST SET-UP AS A COMPANY TO PRODUCE GAMES FOR THE POPULAR 8-BIT COMPUTERS OF THE TIME.

1987 ITS FIRST GAME *BLOOD VALLEY* IS PUBLISHED BY GREMLIN GRAPHICS FOR THE 8-BIT HOME COMPUTERS. IT RECEIVES QUITE MIXED REVIEWS.

1989 TECMO'S *GEMINI WING* BECOMES THE COMPANY'S FIRST EVER COIN-OP CONVERSION. IT IS PUBLISHED BY VIRGIN GAMES ON ALL THE MAJOR HOME COMPUTERS.

1991 IMAGITEC BEGIN ITS PROLIFIC PARTNERSHIP WITH ATARI BY PRODUCING A VERSION OF ITS ATARI ST AND AMIGA GAME *VIKING CHILD* FOR THE LYNX.

1992 *THE HUMANS* IS RELEASED ACROSS MULTIPLE FORMATS AND BECOMES ITS BIGGEST HIT. IT WAS LATER RENAMED *DINO DUDES* BY ATARI.

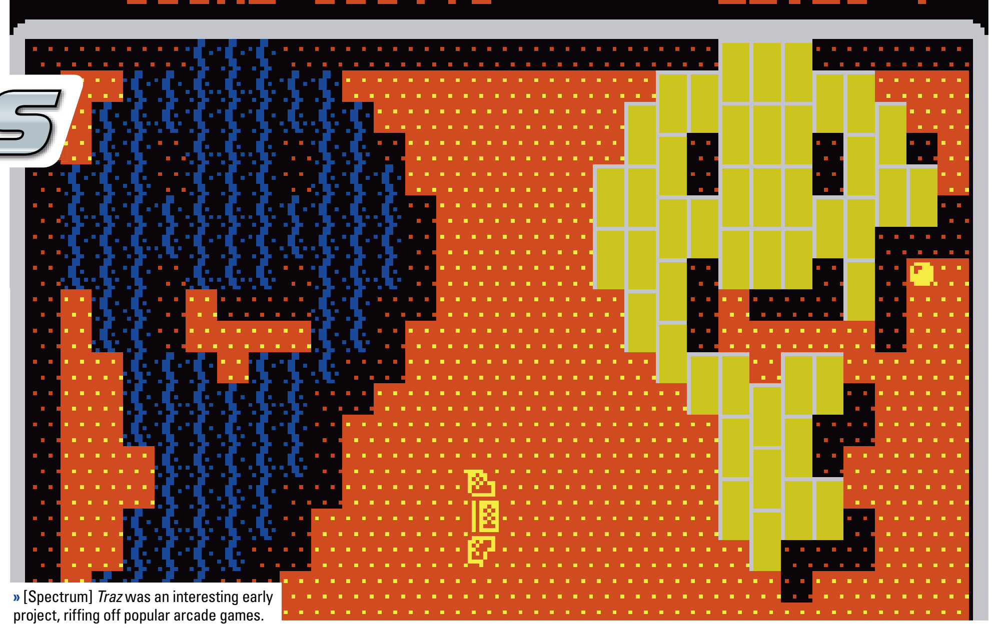
1993 THE ATARI JAGUAR IS RELEASED WITH TWO GAMES BY IMAGITEC DESIGN IN ITS LAUNCH LINE-UP, *DINO DUDES* AND A CONVERSION OF THE SMASH HIT COIN-OP *RAIDEN*.

1994 JEFF MINTER'S *TEMPEST 2000* IS RELEASED ON THE JAGUAR TO CRITICAL ACCLAIM WITH MUSIC BY IMAGITEC DESIGN. IMAGITEC WOULD LATER CONVERT THE GAME TO THE PC ITSELF.

1995 IT RELEASES ITS ONE AND ONLY SOUNDTRACK TRACK CD THROUGH ATARI, THE MUSIC FROM *TEMPEST 2000*. A SIMILAR CD CONTAINING THE *DEFENDER 2000* SOUNDTRACK WAS ALSO PLANNED AND COMPLETED BUT NEVER RELEASED.

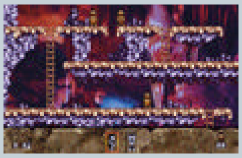
1997 IMAGITEC DESIGN IS BOUGHT OUT BY GREMLIN INTERACTIVE ALONG WITH DMA DESIGN AS A RESULT OF THE COMPANY'S STOCK MARKET FLOTATION.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

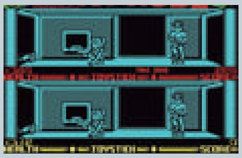


» [Spectrum] *Traz* was an interesting early project, riffing off popular arcade games.

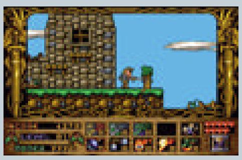
SIX OF THE BEST



The Humans (PC) [1992]
When *Lemmings* first came out, many people tried to clone the formula and without a doubt this game was the most successful result. A strategy puzzle game where you help prehistoric man discover fire, invent the wheel and avoid dinosaurs!



Xenophobe (Spectrum) [1989]
Imagitec handled the home computer ports of this popular Bally/Midway arcade game that was very reminiscent of the Aliens films. The arcade game had three-player split screen, and the home versions had two-player but every bit as good.



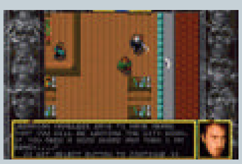
Viking Child (Amiga) [1990]
A blatant but excellent clone of Sega's popular *Wonder Boy In Monster Land* coin-op, this Nordic platformer features some beautiful graphics, great level design and art style, big feisty bosses and inventive power-ups.



I-War (Jaguar) [1995]
Released exclusively for the Atari Jaguar in 1995, this 3D polygon shooter clearly took its inspiration from the cult Disney film *Tron*. You are trapped inside a super computer and must cure the viruses, fix the corrupted database and then escape.

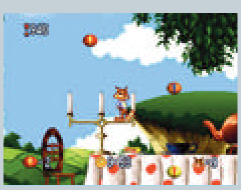


Raiden (Jaguar) [1994]
The original version of *Raiden* by Seibi Kaihatsu was a huge hit in the arcades. Imagitec Design handled the Lynx, Amiga, PC, Falcon and Jaguar ports of this game with the latter being regarded as one of the best versions of this popular title.

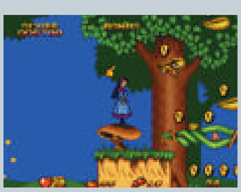


Daemonsgate (PC) [1992]
A fantasy role-playing game released for the ST, Amiga and PC where you control a party of characters searching the land of Hestor for a wise wizard who possesses the knowledge to help stop an invading demon army.

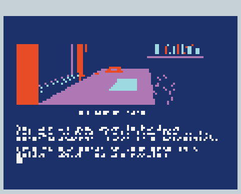
THREE TO AVOID



Bubsy In: Fractured Furry Tales (Atari Jaguar) (1994)
The *Bubsy* games have always got a lot of flak as ill-conceived *Sonic* clones with an annoying main character and terrible play mechanics. Of the 2D versions this Jaguar exclusive is by far the worst. Some of the most unfair deaths ever in a videogame.



Snow White: Happily Ever After (SNES) (1994)
Back in the early Nineties everyone was releasing platformers to try and compete with the likes of *Sonic* and *Mario*. This game is about as generic a platformer as you will ever come across and is best left forgotten.



Jeffrey Archer: Not a Penny More, Not a Penny Less (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Atari ST) (1987)
It's a text adventure that uses still graphics to portray key moments within the game. The fact that no further games based on the former MP's books followed should tell you all you need to know.

▶ a taxi from the convention centre to the bar district so we decided to walk, begins Julian. "Not really knowing where we're going, five hours, some very dodgy neighbourhoods and some apparently hilarious blisters later we arrive at Rush Street and commence the drinking." He does maintain he learned some things from the trip, though. "There are some very weird people in America but they will give you a lift back to your hotel with their girlfriend sitting on your lap and then give you drugs. Nintendo may have made a 'Game Boy' but Atari made a 'game MAN', Meat Loaf is rather short, and if you're going to use someone else's birth certificate as ID for gods sake memorise their parents names and birthdays!"

One last story from Kristi, which really sums up the work/play balance at Imagitec "We didn't really play games at work. There just wasn't time. When a new game came out, or we wanted to rip something off, we would all gather around a machine and dissect it, play it for research purposes, you understand! That did happen quite often. We did go for a trip once to Sega World to check out the latest games and technology. Martin Hooley was fond of taking us off for the day to the arcades in Blackpool and such like not only to play games, but to let off steam and intake lots of alcohol."

The Atari Age

"Gremlin were not the only company that Imagitec had a special relationship with, the other big one was Atari. During the Tramiel era, Imagitec worked closely with Atari to provide games for the 7800, Lynx, Falcon and Jaguar. Martin Hooley tells us a little more about the relationship. "In the late Eighties I was introduced to Jack Tramiel by Robert Stein of Andromeda Software," he begins. "The first title we did for Atari was to licence to them, and develop *Viking Child* on the Lynx."

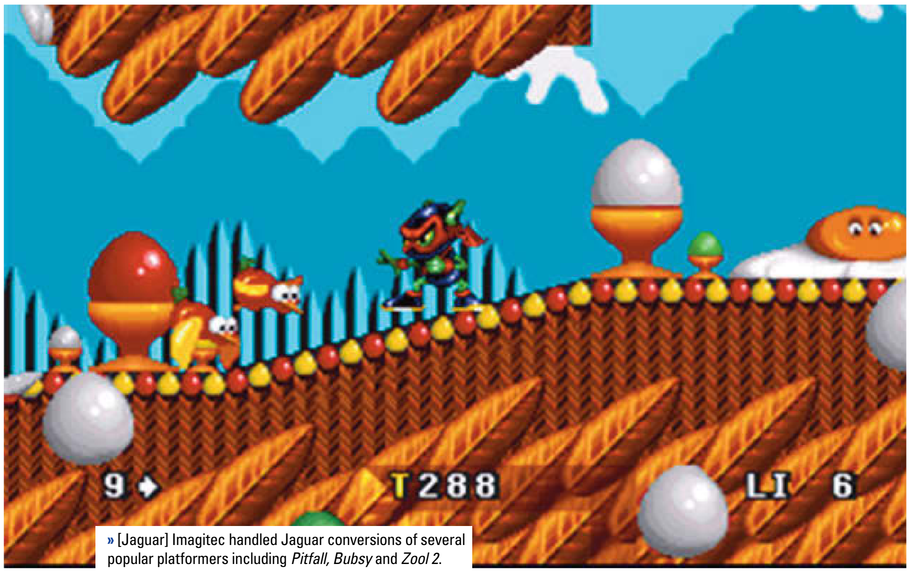
Imagitec went to program several more games for the Lynx and a conversion of the arcade game *Rampart* for the 7800 ProSystem. Following this it was briefly involved with Atari's replacement for the ST computer, the 32-bit Falcon, doing versions of *Raiden*, *Dino Dudes* and a revolutionary new game called *Space Junk*. This was set to be one of the first CD games for the Falcon and was a huge space adventure that mixed the classic point-and-click style with 3D arcade like sequences. I remember designing the characters and I still have some original sketchbook stuff. I also have one of the backgrounds somewhere in the attic, on cardboard because we were hi-tech!" reveals Sharon Dunford, who worked on *Space Junk* as one of its designers.

All of the characters in the game were members of the Imagitec staff wearing giant heads made out of latex. Many of the ex-Imagitec staff still own the heads and they take pride of place in their respective living rooms. Julian was one of the many people to work on the ambitious title telling us; "*Space Junk* was the final thing I worked on at Imagitec before I left. There was some 16-bit flat-shaded lit 3D polygon space flight stuff as well the adventure parts but the two were separate. I remember working a week of all-nighters and then flying to Dusseldorf to demo it for Atari. Fun fun fun."

Programmer Andrew Seed was the next person to work on the project. "I started at Imagitec after Julian had left the company, so for a while myself and Nigel Conroy expanded the demo. I did a *Star Wars* style scroller; the FMV parts and Nigel did a point-and-click adventure section inside a ship. Back then there was no MPEG2 compression so the FMV was a bit larger than normal."

When Atari chose to cease Falcon support to concentrate on its new 64-bit Jaguar console, *Space Junk* was moved across to that platform. It was scheduled to be released as one of the first games for the systems CD add-on but was sadly never finished or released. This leads us on

> **"It was challenging, it was exciting, we felt and acted like rock stars, but lived like paupers!"** KRISTI LOUISE HERD



» [Jaguar] Imagitec handled Jaguar conversions of several popular platformers including *Pitfall*, *Bubsy* and *Zool 2*.

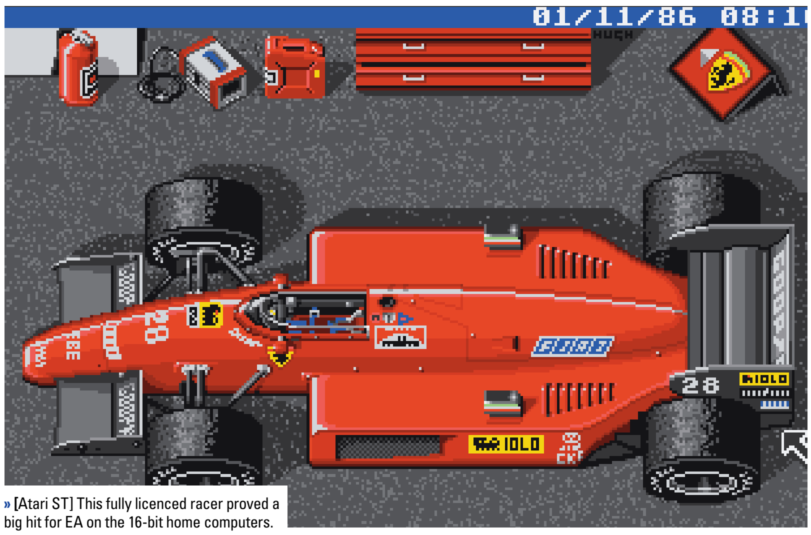

» A typical day at Imagitec Design, somebody has already fallen asleep.

to the company's involvement with Atari's last ever machine: Atari's Jaguar…

Imagitec were one of the very first developers signed up to produce games for the ill-fated console and coded two of the system's launch games – *Evolution: Dino Dudes* and *Raiden*. Programmer Martin Randall remembers the dev set-up very well "The development system for the Jaguar was an Atari TT with a large monochrome monitor and pizza-box style main unit with a separate keyboard, the monitor was huge for the time. I also remember Trevor Raynsford spending ages trying to work out how to get the DSP on the Jaguar to do something useful."

In fact Martin and Trevor were not the only ones to struggle with the system's custom chip set. "The custom chips of the Jaguar did not work correctly, they ran at half speed. They were designed to run code from anywhere but instead could only run code in its own memory, which meant less data being able to be stored locally, so a lot slower." Giving further insight he recalls "I finished *Dino Dudes* at Atari's HQ and got them to finish the Alpine boards (dev board with memory) as they had one button not wired up which was meant to trigger a breakpoint. Which is quite useful to examine memory when something has gone wrong. Its initial development suite was command line based, even the debugger was backwards when you compare it to what was out then and on the TT. They eventually got a PC DOS windowed program running, which was fine."

The many stories of the Tramiel family are out there for all to read and Sam Tramiel is commonly blamed for the downfall of the Jaguar but Martin Hooley remembers things quite differently "The heads of development at Atari were John Skruch and Julie Long, they were bloody fantastic folk. Imagitec had a great relationship with them. As you know the effective boss of Atari was Sam, who was a really good bloke, the CTO was his brother Leonard – he was a different matter. He would hear no wrong about its hardware, if you got into it about problems with the hardware, his standard answer was that it was your skill/aptitude at fault, not its hardware." Once the Jaguar was at its peak, Atari decided for the first time (under the Tramiels) to hire a team of



» [Atari ST] This fully licenced racer proved a big hit for EA on the 16-bit home computers.

in-house programmers and Martin Hooley was not a fan "The people they hired were pretty shit, they turned out to be real back-stabbing folks. They totally turned on the old guard of Skruch and Long. That was the beginning of the end, at this point we had already decided that we did not want to work with the new Atari folks."

This led Martin to make a tough decision. "We called it a day on *Freelancer 2120* and *Space Junk*, as it was obvious that the Jaguar CD was going to flop its arse off and we had zero chance of recovering our investment. Before Atari built its own team in-house, working with the Tramiels, Skruch and Long was great. Afterwards, the people in charge were a bunch of tits." Despite the sour end to the relationship Martin Hooley looks back on the Atari relationship with pride and was particularly proud of its work on the soundtrack for Jeff Minter's classic *Tempest 2000*. "We did quite a bit of freelance music for Atari and its third-party developers. The most notable moment was the audio for Minter's *Tempest 2000*, which Atari actually released as an audio CD too." Imagitec also produced the soundtrack for Minter's next game *Defender 2000*, which was also turned into an audio CD but never released, and wrote the sound engine that was used in most of Atari's self-published games.

Helped by the Atari relationship, the company went from strength to strength and in 1995 it turned over in excess of $5 million. This made many larger companies stand up and take notice, most importantly its old friends Gremlin. After a successful stock market flotation, Gremlin Interactive (as it was then known) were looking to expand and saw the Dewsbury based development house as a perfect fit. It purchased Imagitec, along with *Lemmings* creators DMA Design, and this saw the end of the company as a separate entity. Gremlin would themselves be taken over several years later and become part of French company Infogrames, now known as Atari Interactive, bringing the Atari connection back full circle.

GTA: DEWSBURY



When the original 2D *Grand Theft Auto* game was released in 1997 a port to Sony's PlayStation console quickly followed. The team assigned to the conversion by DMA Design, who had originally created the game, were running into trouble and needed help. Gremlin had just bought DMA after their successful stock flotation along with Imagitec Design too. Due to this arrangement the game was handed over to conversion specialists Imagitec for completion. They completed it and the game was released on time to huge critical acclaim. We all know where the series went from there.



» Atari was so impressed with the music for *T2K* that it released it on audio CD.


» Two of the giant heads from Imagitec's ambitious and unreleased *Space Junk* game.


82
100

RETROREVIVAL

Turok: Dinosaur Hunter

FOG THE DINO HUNTER



» N64
» IGUANA ENTERTAINMENT
» 1997

Before becoming famous for blowing dinosaurs away in videogames, Turok was a comic book hero. His first ever appearance was in a comic anthology that was published in Fifties, before he was selected to appear in his very own comic series two decades later.

First a hero of Western Comics, then of Valiant and then of Acclaim Entertainment when Valiant was purchased by the games publisher in 1994, Turok has had an unsteady upbringing, and it would be fair to say that his games have been equally wavering.

After acquiring Valiant, Acclaim looked at its properties and decided which would translate best to a videogame. *Turok* naturally stood out. The first N64 game by Acclaim, its development hit delays – missing its original September 1996 release date, rumoured to be due to bug fixing, and finally seeing a release in January the following year. A popular early release for the N64, *Turok* was one of the first games (maybe even the first in fact) that I played on the machine. What I still remember most about it were its fog-choked visuals, which actually worked to the game's favour as it made spotting those prowling dinosaurs all the more tense and challenging. Also, I remember that cool way you could kill enemy soldiers by shooting them in the neck. This would cause them to grasp the bullet hole and then gargle their last breaths as blood spurted from their neck. Overall, the visuals and presentation were of a high standard, with believable, clear water to swim in, polished enemy animations and imposing-looking dinosaurs to hunt.

The open world design was also something that made *Turok* stand out for me, as previous first-person shooters (well, the ones I had played) always took place in and around buildings. *Turok* was a different beast though, its world felt more expansive, and as a result more deadly. In fact, though later games have failed to better the original (and its sequel *Seeds Of Evil*), going forward I feel the series could certainly do much worse than take a leaf from the N64 game's book, and create a new instalment where your most challenging enemy isn't predatory dinosaurs but the environment.





GAMING LEGENDS

DAVID PERRY

Retro Gamer takes a look at the enduring career of David Perry, the former Mikro-Gen programmer who made it big in America and created some of the most animated games of all time

Business can be a romance killer for creativity, especially inside large creative industries where imagination and innovation must work under duress from profit making and risk evasion. David Perry is someone who understands how to paint both sides of this delicate fence gold – simultaneously.

Beginning his career as a self-taught programmer, he helped Virgin Interactive grow its games division in the US before splitting off to start up his own studio Shiny Entertainment – the technology and creativity-focused studio located in sunny California that brought the likes of *Earthworm Jim* and *MDK* to our screens.

Born in 1967 and brought up in the towns of Templepatrick and Donegore, in County Antrim, David's first contact with computers came – like most children – from inside a classroom. Attending the Methodist College Belfast, the college received a national grant and invested it in computer equipment. Naturally these newfangled machines were unfamiliar to most of the teachers and as a result it spurred many of the students – David included – to learn them off their own bat.

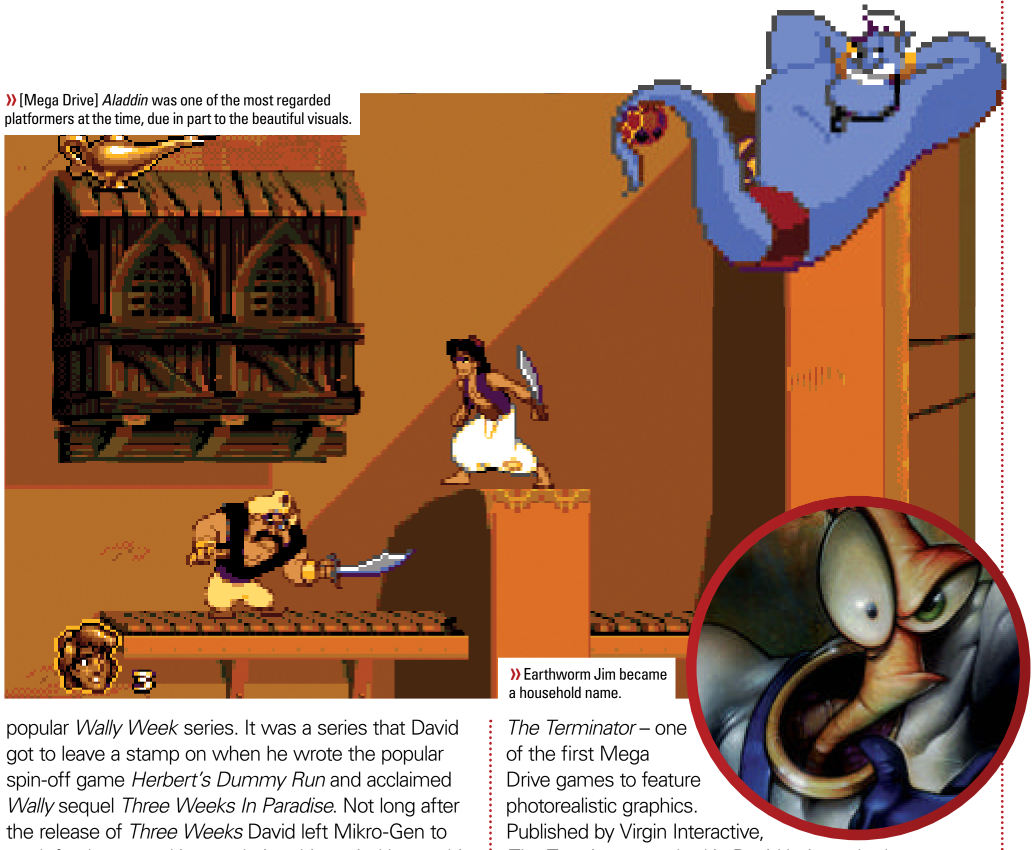
David's mum eventually bought him a ZX81, and with it David set about teaching himself BASIC and inputting program listings printed inside computer hobbyist magazines. After writing his own games and sending those he liked to a ZX80/81 users club magazine, David was delighted when he received a cheque in the mail for £450. Realising that messing around with computers offered a way to make money, it was likely that at that moment the programmer became part businessman.

It was David's type-in game *Drak Maze* that brought him to the attention of Mikro-Gen and got him his first job in the games industry. Moving from his family home in Northern Ireland to England at the age of 17, and paid just £3,500 per year, it was the maturity push David needed. The apron strings were cut and he was leaving college having not completed his course – his only option was to forge a career within the fledging games industry.

At Mikro-Gen, David honed his programming skills under the guidance of Chris Hinsley, the creator of the popular *Wally Week* series. It was a series that David got to leave a stamp on when he wrote the popular spin-off game *Herbert's Dummy Run* and acclaimed *Wally* sequel *Three Weeks In Paradise*. Not long after the release of *Three Weeks* David left Mikro-Gen to work freelance, and it was during this period he got his first taste of managing people when he accepted a big multi-format project for Elite Systems – *Beyond The Ice Palace*. Commissioning out conversions to friends in the industry, it was a stressful project.

Not really enjoying the experience, David then joined Probe Software, and it was there he was introduced to the machine that would ultimately define his career, the Sega Mega Drive. Reapplying his talent for learning hardware without the aid of manuals and tutors, David studied the architecture of the console, and in doing so discovered that he could eke more power from it than Sega would have developers believe. This discovery led to him creating a string of visual and animation-pushing Mega Drive games, beginning with *The Terminator* – one of the first Mega Drive games to feature photorealistic graphics. Published by Virgin Interactive, *The Terminator* resulted in David being asked to move to America to assist Virgin with establishing its US games division. There he helped to bring talent across from the UK and released more performance-pushing Mega Drive titles using his animation technique (later dubbed Animotion), including the popular licenced platformers *Mick & Mack Global Gladiators*, *Cool Spot* and *Disney's Aladdin*.

After turning down a job offer to become the chief technical officer of the Sega Technical Institute (which would have effectively made him Yuji Naka's boss), David was approached by *Ninja Turtles* toy-maker Playmates Toys to help lead its move into the game space. David declined the offer on the table and instead negotiated a $3 million deal with them that ▶

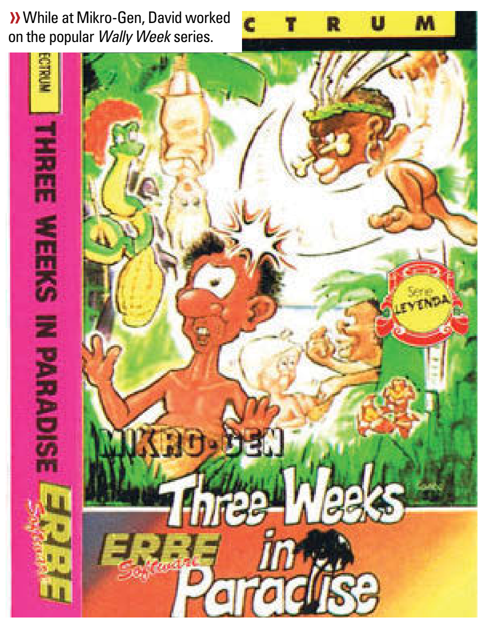


» [Mega Drive] *Aladdin* was one of the most regarded platformers at the time, due in part to the beautiful visuals.

» Earthworm Jim became a household name.



» [Spectrum] *Three Weeks In Paradise* was a lovely end to the *Wally* series.



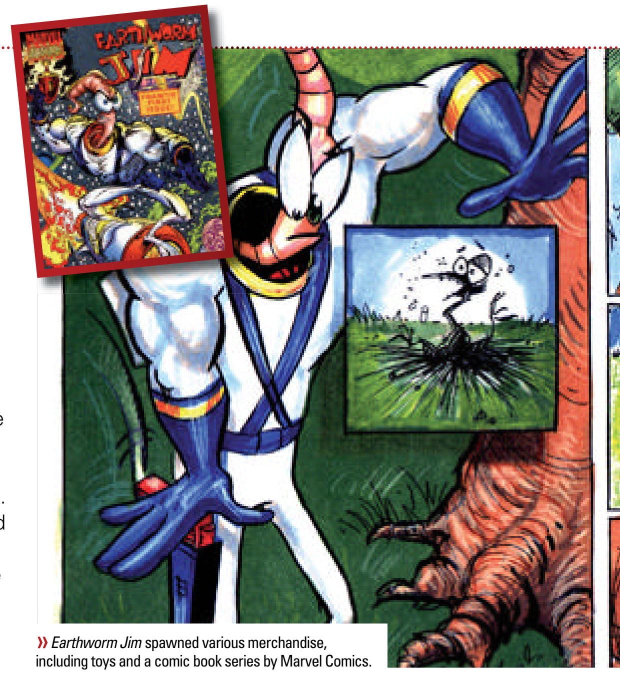
» While at Mikro-Gen, David worked on the popular *Wally Week* series.

would enable him to set up his own studio. In return, Playmates would receive the exclusive rights to its first three titles. Playmates accepted the deal, and David set about hiring those he trusted and respected in the industry, and choosing to set up by the glamorous Laguna Beach, created a studio for creativity and imagination to flourish: Shiny Entertainment.

Shiny's first release was the critically acclaimed *Earthworm Jim* in 1994, which starred a robot-suited earthworm created by award-winning artist Doug TenNapel. Coming to define what Shiny stood for, *Earthworm Jim* was a slick, stylish and imagination-packed platformer, one so successful it received its own toy line and animated series. A successful sequel followed the subsequent year, and then Shiny proved it could handle 3D gaming just as effectively as 2D through the impressive titles *MDK* and *Messiah*. During this time, Shiny was sold to Interplay. It was a deal that upset many members of the team. Feeling let down by David failing to communicate that a sale was taking place, several key staff left the studio, with some going on to work for Doug TenNapel's studio.

Meanwhile, Shiny released several more 3D games into market after *MDK* (another big hit for the studio). Following the success of the *Matrix* tie-in *Enter The Matrix,* Atari bought Shiny from Interplay for $47 million. However, after the release of the follow-up, *Path Of Neo*, Atari was in bad financial shape, and began selling its development studios. Wanting to save his studio, David met with investors in a bid to try to buy the whole of Atari Corporation from Infogrames, but after securing funding a meeting was turned down. Unable to buy either Shiny or Atari, David instead found a separate buyer for Shiny (Foundation 9, now Double Helix Games), walked away and set up the videogame consultancy firm GameConsultants.com.

David's most recent venture is Gaikai, Inc, an innovative cloud-based service that allows users to



» *Earthworm Jim* spawned various merchandise, including toys and a comic book series by Marvel Comics.

SHINY HAPPY PEOPLE

David Perry might have led Shiny Entertainment to prominence but the success it enjoyed was down to teamwork. To ensure a solid foundation for his studio, David hired some of the best talent in the industry. Here are just some of those shiny happy people…







NICK BRUTY

During the golden age of gaming it was common for a close working friendship to form between a programmer and artist. David's partner was artist Nick Bruty. Nick was already working at Probe before David joined the company – David got the job by turning around an Amstrad conversion of Nick's game *Trantor: The Last Stormtrooper* in 24 hours. David and Nick both later worked together at Probe, before both men moved to Virgin Interactive in the US. Nick left Virgin to help David set up Shiny, and worked alongside Stephen Crow on *EWJ1* and *2*. He also project managed *MDK*. Nick is now president of Planet Moon Studios.

BOB STEVENSON

Bob and Nick Bruty formed the main bulk of the *MDK* team at Shiny, producing the 3D storyboards that demoed the game. Shortly after *MDK*, both men set up their own company Planet Moon Studios. Planet Moon has developed the games *Giants: Citizen Kabuto, After Burner: Black Falcon* and *Armed And Dangerous*. It's most recent titles include the rhythm action game *Battle Of The Bands* and *Tangled: The Video Game*, both for Wii. Stevenson later co-founded the mobile phone games publisher ngmoco.

DOUG TENNAPEL & MIKE DIETZ

Previously Doug worked as a television animator before applying his talent to videogames. Having worked as an artist on the Mega Drive games *Jurassic Park* and *Ren & Stimpy: Stimpy's Invention*, Doug was invited to Shiny's offices and showed David a walk animation for Earthworm Jim. The rest, as they say, is history. Doug eventually left Shiny to start his own studio The Neverhood with fellow animator Mike Dietz. The studio released three games, the self-titled point-and-click adventure *The Neverhood*, and platformer sequel *Skullmonkeys* and arena fighting game *BoomBots*.

STEPHEN CROW

The legendary Spectrum artist and programmer who wrote *Starquake*, *Firelord* and *Wizard's Lair*, Stephen worked with David at Probe Software before relocating to America to work for Virgin Games. While at Virgin, Stephen and David worked together on *Disney's Aladdin*. When David left to set up Shiny, he was looking to hire two artists for the studio. When artist Christian Laursen turned down a job offer at the last minute, Stephen took the role instead. Stephen worked on *EWJ1* and *2* as a level artist and designer. He now works at Blizzard on the *World Of Warcraft* series.

NICK JONES

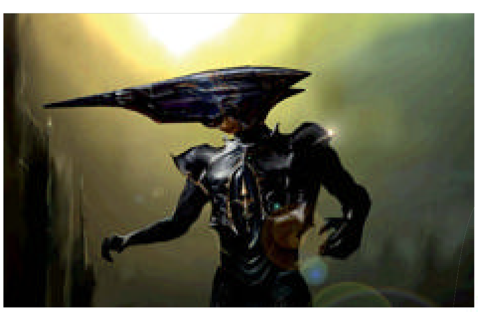
Nick and David's relationship stretches back the longest amount of time, as they met at Mikro-Gen. When the ill-fated Mikro Plus unit spelled the end of the company, David and Nick went freelance. Over time Nick adapted his C64 programming skills for the SNES and worked with Nick Bruty on the acclaimed SNES game *Alien 3* for Probe Software. Nick later received a phone call from David about a job offer at Shiny. Nick accepted, moved to California and became the studio's Super Nintendo guy – he programmed the SNES version of *Earthworm Jim*. Nick now works for 2K Games.



play the latest game releases via web browsers and internet steaming – meaning that a relic of a PC could play something like *Assassin's Creed III* if hooked up to the internet and the connection speed is fast enough. Helping to push, perfect and most crucially – communicate – this technology to the masses since becoming a co-founder of the company in June 2008, David, now its CEO, has helped Gaikai to gain a considerable amount of attention from all areas of the industry. The service has enjoyed backing from big publishers such as EA and Ubisoft and now from a major hardware developer – in July 2012 Sony Computer Entertainment purchased Gaikai for $380 million dollars.

David's knowledge, passion and ideas for videogames have had a big impact on the industry. Its's now a billion dollar business that is equal to the music and film industry, and David was instrumental in that, helping to expose videogames as lucrative brands and also as an effective way to help promote the products of other companies. How has the games industry grown so rapidly in the last 15 years? We'd argue that a big part of its growth is down to more businesses and corporations taking an interest in them.

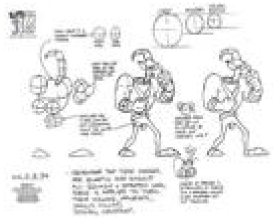
But to perceive David solely as a businessman is unfair. As a programmer, quality and innovation is always at the core of his work. And as a game designer he has helped to bring some of the most format-pushing and exciting games to our screens. And it's because of his deep knowledge and experience in both business and game design that he is one of the most respected veterans still working in the industry today.



» [PC] *MDK* marked Shiny's first 3D project, and was a stunning looking shooter.

"MEMORABLE QUOTES"

"I think Audio is the most undervalued part of game development, love these people, the emotional value they deliver in your game is incredible!"





"What's an easy angle to make your game stand out? Add humour. It's not 'The Catapult Game' it's 'Angry Birds'"

"I was asked to come to Joel Silver's offices and meet the directors [the Wachowskis]. So I did and they pitched me the first Matrix movie. Because we were deep into Sacrifice at the time I actually passed on it. After the movie came out, I was watching it in a movie theatre kicking myself! Biggest mistake ever!"

"I'm sitting at a table with Hideo Kojima and Stan Lee, we are signing autographs. There are lines of people, finally Stan Lee runs out of people interested in his autograph and Hideo Kojima still has a long, long line of people having him sign their wallets, clothing, etc. Stan Lee leans back in his chair and says to me 'Who is this guy!?'"

"People used to program flight simulators in less memory than it takes to store the eBay logo"

"Hey Hey 16K is the best song ever."



Minority Report

This month in Minority Report, we rescue a princess over and over, visit a spooky castle, play a maniacal tree surgeon, indulge in some petty crime, don an expensive suit and then hire the services of some dinosaurs for… Well, we're not entirely sure



MAGICAL PUZZLE POPILS

■ SYSTEM: GAME GEAR ■ DEVELOPER: TENGEN ■ YEAR: 1991



»[Game Gear] Watch the movement and position of the princess and time your block-bashing accordingly.

■ From the fertile imagination of *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands* creator Fukio Mitsuji, *Magical Puzzle Popils* has become something of a hidden gem among puzzle fans. The game tells the most used story in videogame history: boy sets out to rescue girl from an evil wizard. However, what makes this version of the tale somewhat unusual is that you rescue her within minutes of pressing the start button, and then you must repeat the act over and over during the course of the game.

Popils' gameplay works as follows. In each of its 100 stages you are presented a single screen with a structure made up of columns. Your hero starts in one position and the princess is situated in a hard to reach area. Using the least number as 'steps' as possible – a single step is measured in a punch and walking or climbing one block space – you must carefully punch the bricks to alter sections of the structure and ultimately get to where the princess is.

You must also consider the automated movement of the princess, who wanders back and forth along the blocks, when timing your punches. And not all surfaces can be destroyed. It's also vital that you take note of what's above and beneath the tiles that you break. For instance, you could knock away the block beneath your character and cause him to land on a spike, or smash the block that inadvertently causes him to alter the layout of the stage, making it impossible to reach her.

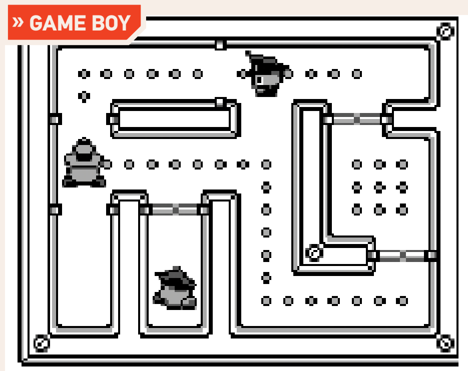
Luckily though, by pressing the A and B buttons together, you can quickly reset the stage. Deadly



» TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE

■ SYSTEM: ATARI 2600
■ DEVELOPER: VSS ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **Based on the** infamous slasher movie from the Seventies, this poor-selling and now rare Atari 2600 game was developed by a B-movie distribution company. The game sees you place in the blood stained boots of Leatherface as he runs through a field trying to stick poor girls with his revving tree-feller. The gameplay is pretty basic: shrubs, cow skulls and wheelchairs block his path and must be dodged or chainsawed as points are earned through kills. Petrol is the biggest issue, as failure to keep your murder spree in gas causes it to come to an end.



» LOCK 'N CHASE

■ SYSTEM: GAME BOY
■ DEVELOPER: DATA EAST ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **Debuting in arcades** and playing like a mix of *Pac-Man* and *Bonanza Bros.*, *Lock 'n Chase* is a simple and enjoyable puzzler that stars a crook that must go around collecting up coins in mazes without getting caught by the long arm of the law. The unique thing here, though, is that he can open and close doors to partially direct the actions of the police. Occasionally, gems appear, and collecting these make your character temporarily invincible. And money bags can be grabbed that cause the enemies to have a little cry, buying you a bit of breathing space. It's a simple and enjoyable dot-muncher, perfect for handheld play.



» SHIN KIDOU SENKI GUNDAM W – ENDLESS DUAL

■ SYSTEM: SUPER NES
■ DEVELOPER: NATSUME ■ YEAR: 1996

■ **Even if you're** unfamiliar with the *Gundam* series, a popular Japanese mech-themed anime that first aired in the Seventies, fight fans should still check out this one-on-one brawler based on the franchise. Boasting sumptuous visuals, rocking music and some silky combat, it's like an unsucky *Rise Of The Robots*. After selecting a mobile suit from the varied (in fighting but not in looks) nine in the game, you compete in a tournament to fight the rest. With a good assortment of varied moves, plus the fact you can fight and hover in the air, it's a solid 2D fighter.

» [Game Gear] Before each stage you're shown a map displaying the layout of the stage.



» [Game Gear] If one stage has got you stumped you can always attempt another.





» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- A white variant and a red version were released to promote the game *Coca Cola Kid.*
- A number of accessories were released for the Game Gear, including a TV tuner, Master System convertor and power pack.



slime monsters and teleportation units get added to the mix to increase the challenge on the later stages, but the core concept remains the same: get to the girl, or get her to you.

With its lovely chunky cartoon-style visuals and jaunty tunes, *Popils* does have the look and feel of a *Bubble Bobble* spin-off – though the games are only connected by their creator.

The great thing *Popils* has is plenty of replayability. After completing the game once in any amount of turns you like, you are then invited to try and 'perfect' its levels. Perfecting levels involves completing them in a requisite number of turns or fewer – and if this is achieved you unlock a second ending.

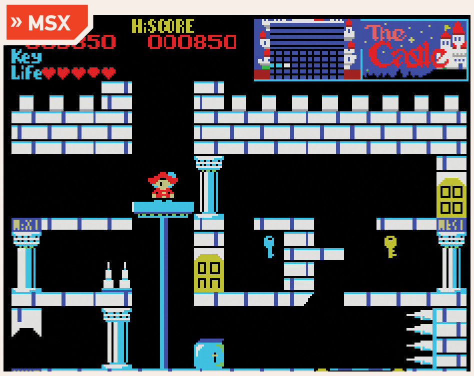
As well as this, there is also a neat level editor that allows you to create up to 30 of your own *Popils* stages to test on your friends and save them onto the cartridge. Packed with stages and such a surprising amount of replayability, this fun and charming puzzle platformer is one of the best examples of its genre on the Game Gear.





» [Game Gear] Once you've rinsed the game, you can get endless enjoyment from the simple level editor.

» MSX

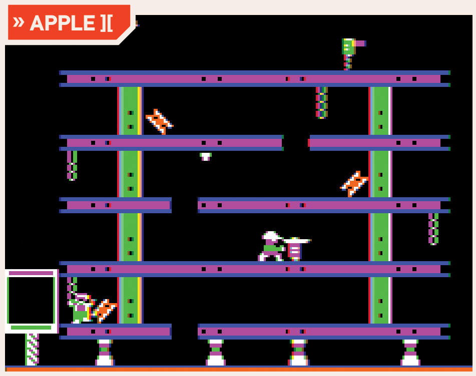


» THE CASTLE

■ SYSTEM: MSX
■ DEVELOPER: ASCII CORPORATION ■ YEAR: 1986

■ **Though its looping** music will drive you insane, *The Castle* is a fun little platform/puzzle romp. It stars a little guy dressed like a musketeer who must make his way through the deadly rooms of a giant castle to rescue a princess. After collecting a map early in the game, you start to appreciate the size of the castle. Each of its 100 rooms has an entrance and exit (sometimes exits) and to get about you must collect keys and move furniture to get about. Guards, spikes and killer jelly must be avoided, and as you clear a room so its corresponding map square gets filled in to show how close you are to the princess.

» APPLE][

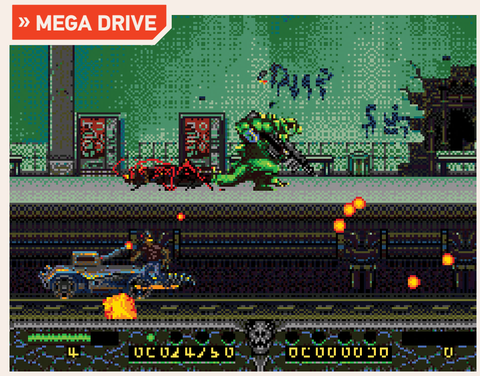


» HARD HAT MACK

■ SYSTEM: APPLE][
■ DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **This platformer was** one of the first games to be published by Electronics Arts, and caused a bit of a stir on its release as a result of portraying a health and safety worker as a villain. *Hard Hat Mack* is a platformer split into three sections. The first sees you leading Mack around a building frame, laying down rivets and securing them using a jackhammer, while a vandal runs around trying to kill him. The second takes place on a construction site, with Mack collecting lunchboxes. The final one sees you help guide him round a factory, picking them up and depositing them. Challenging, fun and varied, it's a decent *Donkey Kong* alike.

» MEGA DRIVE



» DINOSAURS FOR HIRE

■ SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
■ DEVELOPER: MALIBU ■ YEAR: 1993

■ **Based on a** comic book and never seeing release outside of the US, *Dinosaurs For Hire* will probably be obscure to most gamers. Starring three dinosaur heroes, each with different attributes, they do battle with enemies ranging from ninjas, guys riding bikes and skateboards, giant cockroaches and armoured vehicles because… well, we're not sure. There doesn't seem to be a story. All we know is these dinosaurs are clearly for rent and the world is out to kill them, which begs the question: who's employing them? A tricky shooter that owes much to *Contra* but is nowhere near as good; one for die-hard action fans.

THE MAKING OF

CARRIER COMMAND

Richard Hewison talks to Ian Oliver from Realtime Games and Gary Sheinwald and Ricardo Pinto from Rainbird Software about how they made the original, futuristic seafaring 3D arcade and strategy game, Carrier Command



» This *Carrier Command* sticker was seen stuck to the windows of the Rainbird offices in central London.



CARRIER COMMAND LOADING SCREEN ART COURTESY OF HERMAN SERRANO, VISIT WWW.RAWSUNLIGHT.DAPORTFOLIO.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION

3*D Tank Duel*, 3D Starstrike and *Starstrike II* were all high profile 8-bit 3D titles that put Realtime Games on the gaming map in the mid-Eighties. Co-founders Andy Onions, Graeme Baird and Ian Oliver had met whilst studying a Computer Science Degree at Leeds University, as Ian explains. "We were very different people, but we had one thing in common. The University wasn't quite sure what to make of us, and vice versa!"

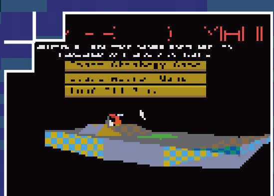
The three graduates ended up writing *3D Tank Duel* during their final year, a game that was heavily inspired by Atari's *Battlezone* coin-op. They published the game in early 1984, netting over £21,000, which was a fortune back then. "That made writing further games a no-brainer!" recalls Ian happily. Realtime quickly became far more proficient at coding for the Z80, and as a result, its second game came together in just a few months.

"*3D Starstrike* for the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC sold 55,000 copies and we made four pounds per copy. Life was good!" says Ian fondly, recalling their Atari *Star Wars* coin-op inspired 3D arcade blaster. A few months later, work began on the inevitable sequel. *Starstrike II* used shaded polygon 3D, which was a technique still in its infancy. However, after being inspired by two Atari 3D vector coin-ops for their first two offerings, Realtime had an epiphany with the sequel.

"It was then that we discovered cloning an existing game was a lot easier than creating one from scratch!" admits Ian. The result was that *Starstrike II* was finished extremely late. So late that when it finally pushed the Spectrum version out of the door, it realised that the UK games industry had changed. Distributors, publishers and developers alike were forced into becoming more professional as the market matured. Unfortunately, Realtime had failed to enlighten the press or the distributors about its *Starstrike* sequel until it was almost finished, resulting in a severe lack of reviews and sales when they needed the revenue most. "*Crash* magazine gave us a cracking review, and the smaller distributors and retailers were still a significant part of the market, but it didn't set the world alight," recalls Ian sadly.

Just when things were starting to get tight, Realtime received a phone call from BT-owned Rainbird Software that was to forever change its fortunes… "Rainbird wanted to discuss Z80 ports of Jez San's *Starglider*," says Ian. "But one thing lead to another. Suddenly we had a publisher and they even stepped in to publish the Amstrad CPC version of *Starstrike II*."

That deal lifted some of the pressure and the advance payments from Rainbird gave Realtime the chance to buy some better development tools in the form of the Programmer's ▶



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** RAINBIRD
- » **DEVELOPER:** REALTIME GAMES
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC, AMSTRAD CPC, ZX SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64, APPLE MACINTOSH
- » **GENRE:** SIMULATION

> I was young and foolish and clearly thought that anything was possible!
>
> IAN OLIVER

THE MAKING OF



Development System, better known by the acronym, PDS. This move had a significant effect, as Ian recalls. "Our productivity and our general mental state soared and we polished off a slew of Z80 versions of *Starglider* ahead of schedule, which doesn't tend to happen! We even finished before the lead ST and Amiga versions of *Starglider* were complete!"

The fact that Jez San got more money for his 16-bit originals and a cut of the royalties on Realtime's Z80 versions didn't go unnoticed in Leeds, as Ian explains. "That's when we decided that our future lay in producing original product for the new 16-bit machines." A Publication Agreement was signed with Rainbird on 19 March 1987 for an original game with a working title of *SCS* for the Atari ST, Apple Macintosh, Commodore Amiga, IBM PC, 48k and 128k Spectrums, Amstrad CPC and Amstrad PCW. Incredibly, the agreement signed by Ian Oliver committed Realtime to producing the lead Atari ST version in just over four months, with each subsequent version following in monthly intervals through to the end of 1987. "I signed that contract the day after my 24th birthday. I was young and foolish and clearly thought that anything was possible!" says Ian, laughing. But what was this *SCS* named as the working title in the agreement?

"*SCS* stood for *Submarine Combat Simulator*," reveals Ian. Rainbird publisher Paul Hibbard had hired an external freelance designer, whom Ian spoke to a few times. Unfortunately, it became clear quite early on that his submarine design wasn't going to work out, as Ian remembers. "This guy was coming up with page after page of ever more complex monsters and undersea volcanos, which didn't gel at all with what we wanted to do." In the end, the submarine game was scuttled and a new idea was needed, "…but by then we had sci-fi and the sea in our heads!" adds Ian. Clearly, the general scenario if not the game design itself was going to have an influence on what came next.

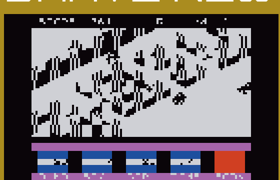
Thankfully, back at Rainbird there was a back-up plan involving Ricardo Pinto, Clare Edgeley and Gary Sheinwald. Ricardo was formerly a programmer who had worked on *Gyron*, *Hive* and the Z80 conversions of *Elite* for BT before joining the publisher as a project manager. "Paul Hibbard asked if I could think anything up," says Ricardo, who is now a fantasy writer with a string of successful novels behind him. "My core proposal was something along the lines of a carrier force, fighting another carrier force across an archipelago."

Gary Sheinwald remembers sitting in the Rainbird office and swapping ideas with Ricardo on the aircraft carrier design, although his recollection of where the idea originally came from differs



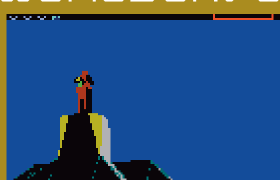
» [C64] Fitting a Manta in the C64 version.

BRAVE NEW WORLDS: 10 OTHER GAMES THAT DEFINED 3D



3D ANT ATTACK (1983)

■ The first game on the Sinclair Spectrum to employ solid 3D and an isometric viewpoint, *Ant Attack* set down a marker for others to follow. The 'Soft Solid 3-D' technique, combined with Angela's graphics presented an experience like no other. Sandy's subsequent game *I, Of The Mask* featured faster, more solid 3D but lightning wasn't caught twice.



THE SENTINEL (1986)

■ Although set in an abstract, chess-like 3D world, Geoff Crammond's *The Sentinel* was immersive thanks to the tension that built as the eponymous sentinel turned its gaze across the polygon landscape. The 3D was slow on the 8-bits, but the later ST, Amiga and PC versions were faster. If you want a modern interpretation, seek out *Zenith*.



VIRUS (1987)

■ *Virus* is like marmite. You either love it or hate it. It's either got the best control system for a true 3D shoot-'em-up or it's got the most finicky, infuriating controls ever designed. There's no denying the brilliance of the 3D graphics though, and there's a free modern remake called *Z-Virus* that shows an even larger 3D world beyond.



STARGLIDER 2 (1988)

■ Jez San's sequel to his own *Starglider* game featured a whole solar system of planets to fly to and explore both above and below the ground. The esoteric space whales, sun fly-bys for refuelling and battles with space pirates were all in quick 3D. The game came out six months after *Carrier Command*, giving *Rainbird* two 3D smashes in the same year!



MIDWINTER I/II (1989)

■ Mike Singleton's epic strategy game, set on the island of Midwinter. It featured a 3D world that depicted snowy mountains and a number of different ways to travel across the island, on skis, by gliding or driving snow vehicles. The light source shaded 3D polygons added an extra level of realism to the world which Maelstrom used again in the sequel.

slightly. "I can remember the brainstorming session where Clare came up with the idea, and then Ricardo and I sitting at my desk coming up with the basic gameplay and features, then him walking over to his desk across the office and typing it up." The document they created was six pages long. It contained many elements familiar to any *Carrier Command* fan. The game was called *Strategic Carrier Simulation*, which was curiously the same acronym as the aborted submarine design. Although he can't remember the exact reason, Ricardo has a plausible theory as to why they both shared the same initials. "Remember that Rainbird was a subsidiary of BT and that masses of documents would already have been handed 'upstairs', so to change the name completely would have only confused people."

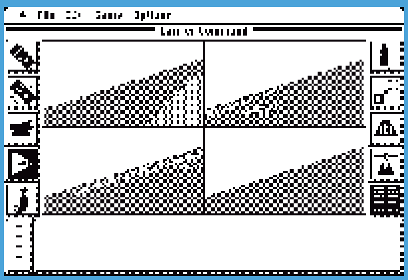
A few short weeks after Rainbird's six page document was sent, Realtime faxed a response back to Gary Sheinwald, dated 4 August 1987. Clearly the dates in the original agreement were extended, as there wasn't even an agreed design yet the completion date on the Atari ST version was 31 July, a date that had already been and gone! "Once Rainbird saw that we were actually creating something pretty good, we managed to get more time and further advances," reveals Ian.

Split into eleven brief sections, Realtime's five-page response covered the world the game was to be set in, an overview of the ultimate objectives, a description of the islands and a breakdown of other game features like building control centres, why the player would want to capture enemy control centres and so on. "We kept the original Rainbird document on our office wall, and pulled out ideas that were woven into the final game," explains Ian. "There is an old adage that success has many fathers whereas failure is an orphan!" he adds. "I'm happy to accept that *Carrier* had many fathers, and elements were drawn from both teams, but it was ultimately down to what we could actually code and Graeme and I were quite obstinate at the time and clearly acted as final arbiters."

At Rainbird, the game quickly adopted the title *Archipelago*, based upon the opening paragraph of their initial design document, which stated: "The war is to be fought over a long archipelago. The main line of islands is strung out from north to south, with the player's main base being located on the most southern island and the enemy's being located on the most northern."

As development began in earnest, Ricardo Pinto's focus shifted to his own strategy design called *City States*. Soon afterwards, he decided to leave TelecomSoft and go freelance, working on game designs including the abandoned *EPT* – ironically for Rainbird – and *Cybercon III*, published by U.S. Gold. Gary Sheinwald became the day-to-day producer on *Archipelago* and still harbours clear memories of the early versions that Realtime produced in late 1987. "I remember asking them to change the colours of the game since almost everything in it was black or very dark," says Gary, who is clearly quite proud of his involvement from the publisher's end. "I came up with the acronyms MANTA and WALRUS for the vehicles, I wrote the manual, photocopying the 'Top Secret' front cover about fifty times to make it look like a faded ink stamp and I also named most of the islands".

The island names were quite entertaining, with many named after people including Serrano, Odracir, Edgeley and Byrne (after TelecomSoft Director Paula Byrne). Greek myths also featured heavily, with Charibdis, Endymion and Medusa amongst others. Just for laughs there was also Milestone (as in something you might sail past!) and Elwood (named ▶



» [Mac] Only the last two versions of *Carrier* included this view from all launched mantas.

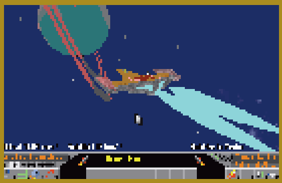
Rainbird could have got awkward but it didn't, far from it

IAN OLIVER



F1 GRAND PRIX I/II/III (1992)

■ Geoff Crammond's first love is Formula racing. Having tried to simulate F3 cars on the C64 with *Revs*, Geoff created his own car sport with *Stunt Car Racer*. Both games were just an aperitif to the main meal, *Formula One Grand Prix*. While the 3D improved with each version, the first F1 game made the most impression.



FRONTIER: ELITE II (1993)

■ *Frontier* creates a galaxy that feels like it's teeming with other NPC pilots all trying to make a living way out in deep space. The 3D system was unique in appearance, but possibly over-ambitious for the processing power found in the Amiga and the PCs of the day. It was also a tad garish in palette choice and combat was pretty tricky to master.



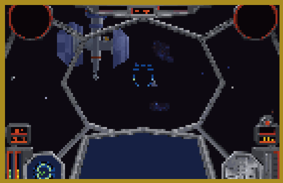
WORLD TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIPS (1993)

■ Most people don't think of sports games when they think of 3D, but this innovative tennis simulation employed a system that was played with a mouse, yet taught you techniques that helped when playing the real thing. The 3D looks basic today, but after just a few minutes play, you felt like you were on a real tennis court.



STARLORD (1993)

■ The majority of the game might not have been played in 3D, but when you jumped in and took control of a starfighter in mid-skirmish, the 3D battles in the PC version were very impressive. *Starlord* used 3D techniques refined from Maelstrom's earlier games, and borrowed camera angles and fly-by views from MicroProse's flight simulators.



STAR WARS: TIE FIGHTER (1994)

■ *X-Wing* was terrific but was also extremely hard. *TIE Fighter* made a little easier and the 3D engine was refined and included lightsource shading. The subsequent CD-ROM release went one better, adding a high-res mode for an even sharper experience. Throw in an iMuse soundtrack and it couldn't fail.

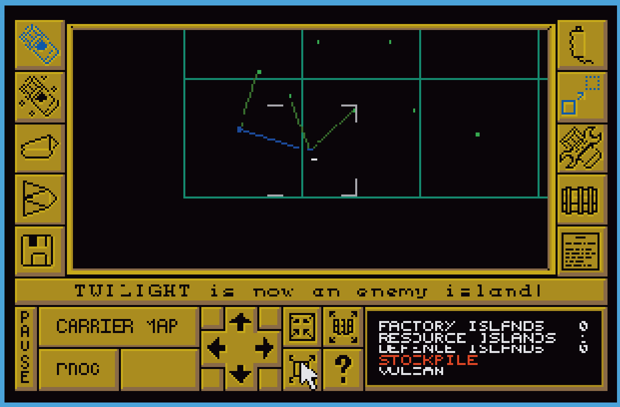
THE MAKING OF

▶ after Dan Akroyd's character in *The Blues Brothers*). Of course, Gary was a big fan of *The Blues Brothers*, and managed to get a famous line from that film into the hidden cheat mode, where you had to type 'We're on a mission from god'.

With Andy Onions busy on side projects for Realtime Games, Graeme and Ian did the bulk of the work on the game they were simple calling *Aircraft Carrier*, or *ACC* for short. "Graeme worked on the 3D system whilst I cracked on with the graphics primitives and input drivers," recalls Ian happily. They quickly had things flying around on the screen, but it was a long way short of being a playable game. "We had no real clue about the control system, so I sat down one day, wrote a routine called 'choccyboxes' that drew the rather distinctive buttons in *Carrier*, and started playing around with it. By the end of the day, I had *Carrier*'s control system designed!" adds Ian, proudly.

Initially there were a few icons down the sides plus a message area at the bottom, with no polished artwork in sight. Later on, artist Herman Serrano replaced some of the temporary icon graphics with his own, as well as providing the box artwork and the loading screen on the ST and Amiga versions. However, after this initial surge of good progress, problems soon began to surface. It became clear that Realtime

» [Atari ST] The map showed the resource network and kept you informed when islands were taken.



> I remember asking them to change the colours of the game since almost everything in it was black or very dark
>
> GARY SHEINWALD

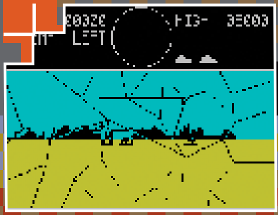
had massively under-estimated the amount of work involved and over-estimated the capabilities of the ST and Amiga. PDS had been updated to support the 68000 instruction set, but nothing much else had changed. This caused serious technical problems that Ian and Graeme had to struggle through. "We were just two guys, working on what became about 50,000 lines of pure 68000 assembler, battling chewy issues of design, 3D, AI, and performance, and having to use tools that really weren't up to the job," remembers Ian, shaking his head at the memory. Unfortunately, it was about to get worse, as about the same time as all these issues were coming to a head, Realtime Games ran out of money.

"Rainbird could have got awkward but it didn't, far from it," says Ian. "It made some milestone payments despite us not really having come up with the goods, which really helped." It wasn't in the publisher's interest to pull the plug at such a late stage, but Rainbird rightly became quite concerned that the game might not get finished at all, let alone on time and on budget. "Rainbird regularly sent people up to Leeds to chivvy us along by reminding us just how late we were, and the dire consequences of this, which didn't help quite so much. I think what made it hard was that *Carrier Command* was clearly going to be something rather special if we ever actually got to finish it!" adds Ian.

As the finishing line began to loom over the horizon, an agreed and commercially acceptable title for the project had to be finalised. "The game was called *Archipelago* for the longest time, but the



» [C64] The C64 version's top-down 2D approach wasn't good.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

3D TANK DUEL (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1984

3D STARSTRIKE
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD
YEAR: 1984

BATTLE COMMAND
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD, AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC, C64
YEAR: 1990

OCEANIC BATTLES

■ Having finished one game based upon battles in the ocean, Realtime Games unofficial follow-up resulted in coding battles for Ocean! The Manchester-based publisher signed up *Battle Command* after new Rainbird owner MicroProse (UK) turned it down. "Graeme and myself did a lot of the design work, and we deliberately made it mission-based," reveals Ian. "In retrospect, this was a mistake, but we didn't want to simply do *Carrier 2* with tanks!" he adds.

Realtime started employing other people. "We had some of the new guys working on environments, gameplay, and other bits and pieces in parallel [with us]," explains Ian. "It was a bad experience overall because we weren't sufficiently hands-on. *Carrier Command* had nearly wrecked us, so we wanted something we knew we could achieve. However, I don't think we aimed high enough."



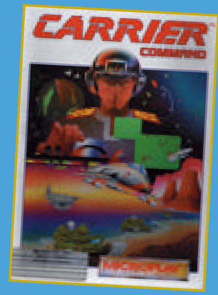
marketing and management folks felt that people wouldn't be able to pronounce the name, or know what it meant, so I lost that battle," admits Gary Sheinwald. "We wrote all the possible names up on a whiteboard and we had a vote. *Carrier Command* won, just beating out the similar *Carrier Commander*." Ian also remembers the discussions. "Rainbird came up with a few. We told them we hated the more zany names, and *Carrier Command* emerged as a consensus. It's down-to-earth descriptions of what you actually do in a game that always appealed to simple engineers like me."

Near the end, Gary decamped up north to ensure that *Carrier Command* set sail on time. "I spent the last week holed up in a hotel in Leeds, tuning the gameplay as we rushed to get it out in time," remembers Gary. Thankfully, they did manage it although not without a bit of last minute fudging to the enemy carrier's AI code. "Hence the ACC Omega warping around and cheating a bit too much, simply because we ran out of time!" explains Gary with a hint of regret. Ian also remembers the problems they faced with the game's arch nemesis. "In the initial ST release, the enemy carrier had a habit of driving onto the islands, which was a bit embarrassing!"

Thankfully, Ian got a chance to improve the ACC Omega's AI routines in the later Mac and PC versions – writing an additional 5000 lines of code – but by then Rainbird had been sold by BT to MicroProse (UK) and its treatment of *Carrier Command* didn't impress the guys at Realtime at all. "MicroProse inherited most of Rainbird's existing games, and then did a truly shoddy job of publishing them, which was deeply disappointing and a major blow. The royalties from other versions only just cleared the advances and we were relying on future royalties to dig us out of our financial hole."

A Commodore 64 conversion was added to the original agreement to replace the cancelled PCW version, and this was farmed out to C64 experts Source, who implemented a 2D sprite-based top-down view, which – in hindsight – was less than successful, leading to a disappointing game. The last version of *Carrier Command* developed by Realtime was for the Apple Macintosh. It was an all monochrome affair, and they ended up writing it twice.

"That version was scrapped once we learnt more about how the Mac OS actually worked!" reveals Ian. The second Mac version ran as an officially legal Mac OS program, running in a window, using desktop gadgets, multifinder and all the usual Mac menus and options. They even got the game running on the Mac 2 once they removed a small amount of self-modifying code. That version wasn't strictly 100% legal as far as Apple was concerned, as it fudged a few things to get over some last-minute technical hitches.


» [Mac] MicroProse only released *Carrier Command* for the Mac in the US.

The Mac version was written on a PC using SNASM, which was a suite of development tools designed specifically by Ian to replace Realtime's reliance on PDS. Its development was sub-contracted and an entirely new company called Cross Products Ltd was set up to support it. SNASM went on to be used by a number of other developers and publishers over the next three or four years.

Ian Oliver has bittersweet memories of *Carrier Command*, as it represents both the peak and the beginning of the end for Realtime Games. "The ST version got some cracking reviews, and we were all very proud of it, but it wasn't without its flaws," admits Ian. "The brave new world of the games industry in the Nineties demanded a high level of glitz, as only the hype-fuelled hits made any money, and we just weren't financially sound enough to grow our team to a size where we could compete. While we did some solid work, including both ports and original product, we produced nothing that even came close to *Carrier Command*."

The game itself has lived long in the memories of those who wrote it, published it, bought and played it. So much so that a new generation of players are still experiencing it, with the recent publication of *Carrier Command: Gaea Mission* for the PC, and continues to enthral gamers worldwide. ■



ICON DO THAT!

■ As the primary tester for Rainbird on the impressive 128k Spectrum version coded by Andy Onions, the author of this article wasn't happy with some of the icons being used in the development versions of the game. So, after being encouraged by project manager Gary Sheinwald, I created some alternatives. I did half a dozen in total, submitted to Realtime on a 3" Spectrum +3 disk that was sent up to Leeds by first class post. Well over twenty years later it's taken some detective work to try and recall which ones are mine! I definitely did the damage control, stores and defence drone icons in the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC versions, and a few more look likely candidates but I can't be too sure after all these years!



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THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





» *Trick Trap* is known as *Labyrinth Runner* in Japan – which is a slightly silly name as only one stage features a labyrinth.

» The game has an unusual theme – it's a bit like *Ghosts'n Goblins* meets *Commando*. Basically, you play a knight armed with guns.

» You can switch weapons on the fly, which is useful as certain situations call for a certain weapon.

» This thing here is your compass. To be honest though, you'll hardly use it as the levels are pretty easy to navigate.

TRICK TRAP 1771

■ **Developer:** Konami ■ **Year:** 1987 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up

■ **This overhead shooter by Konami is one of the developer's lesser-known arcade games, never receiving a home conversion or appearance on a single Konami retro compilation – as far as we can tell anyway.**

Released the same year as Bill and Lance blasted onto the scene in *Contra*, it's perhaps no surprise that *Trick Trap* went under the radar. It's a shame it did though, as it's a decent little blaster that mixes the gameplay and weapons of a war-themed shooter like *Commando* with a supernatural save the princess story similar to *Ghosts'n Goblins*.

In *Trick Trap* you play a medieval prince who, armed with guns and bombs rather than a sword and shield, must battle through five stages to rescue his kidnapped princess from Satan, and by doing so free the land of Vegetaria from his control. The five levels in the game are all distinctly themed: taking our hero from a forest, to the rampart of a castle, a labyrinth, there's a minecart chase level, and finally Satan's castle. Enemies appear from everywhere, so it's vital you keep your wits about you.

That said, what is unusual about *Trick Trap* is that while the game is full of tough enemies, pretty much all bar the bosses can be avoided by legging it. In fact, this rescue mission can be finished in around ten minutes. Time is of the essence in *Trick Trap*, as failure to complete stages within a pretty strict time limit results in a deadly and invincible time umpire appearing on the scene, who hones in on the position of your hero, killing him outright.

Avoiding confronting the standard enemies in the game means you do miss out on grabbing points and the pick-ups they drop, which do come in useful for powering-up your hero and preparing him for the tricky boss encounters.

These pick-ups include additional weapons, like bombs that act like *Commando*'s pineapple grenades and a laser that bounces off walls. The individual weapons do prove useful for certain scenarios – one boss can only be hit with bombs – and so there's a measure of intelligent weapon swapping needed. The visuals are functional, but the music is top-notch. Pretty much every piece of music is ace, with our favourite being the rousing *Conan*-esque final stage music.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

GAUNTLET 1985

A true labyrinth runner, Ed Logg's classic *Gauntlet* is our recommendation. It might not feature any guns, but it is challenging. Take your pick of home conversions too; we have a soft spot for the CPC version.

DR. MICRO

■ **Developer:** Sanritsu ■ **Year:** 1983 ■ **Genre:** Platformer



» [Arcade] *Dr. Micro* might be a blatant *Donkey Kong* clone, but it's a decent one. So that's okay.

■ **This early arcade platformer is a must for *Donkey Kong* fans.** With its cartoon visuals and taxing twitch platform gameplay instantly recalling the Nintendo classic, *Dr. Micro* is something of a hidden gem. Playing the role of a guy who looks like Sega's Alex Kidd, you must beat three stages to thwart an evil scientist (who cameos on each stage to make your life difficult).

Armed with a gun that fires blood (at least, that's what it looks like), the first level sees you lead your character across a series of rising and falling platforms to reach the exit without falling prey to boxing lizards (at least, that's what they look like). The second sees you riding beach balls that gradually float in the air and eventually pop, with you trying to shoot down enough enemies to open the exit and fly into it. The final stage takes place in a laboratory, with robotic machinery to avoid, conveyor belts to tackle and robot bodyguard bosses guarding the doctor. Get to the end and the levels loop. Fun, challenging and addictive; be sure to make an appointment with *Dr. Micro* this month.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

DONKEY KONG 1981



It's a simple choice for this one, obviously! Nintendo's first ever megahit was clearly the inspiration behind *Dr. Micro*. The two could almost be cousins; just compare those two screen shots. And *Donkey Kong* has pretty much appeared on everything.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

UNDER DEFEAT 2005



Like *Ultra X*, your craft is capable of summoning a helpful drone to aid it in battle. It was first ported to Dreamcast, and recently received HD makeovers for Xbox 360 and PS3.

ULTRA X WEAPON

■ **Developer:** Banpresto ■ **Year:** 1995 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up

■ **Based on the *Ultraman* television series, this vertical shooter features a nice selection of varied enemies, with fodder ranging from giant jellyfish, manta rays and yetis, to imposing hydras and giant robots.**

As such, its action is anything but boring, and its appeal comes from seeing what new imaginative creation you'll be blasting away next. *Ultra X* comprises seven stages taking you to battles across the globe, in space and finally on the moon.



» [Arcade] Ultraman was like the Power Rangers of the Sixties. He looked like Gort and beat up rubber monsters.

You begin by first selecting your craft from the choice of seven on offer. Each has its own unique fire type and giant robot buddy that basically acts as your special attack – these can be summoned to appear on the scene to lend a helping hand when things get a bit chaotic. As well as your robo helper and its standard shot, which can be levelled up to include useful homing missiles, each craft can also fire bombs into the air that explode on contact with an enemy, or eventually detonate automatically if undisturbed. It's like *Air Gallet* meets *Bomberman*.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

DARK TOWER

■ **Developer:** Game Room ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up



■ **You can clearly see the thinking behind *Dark Tower*, at its core a *Bubble Bobble*-style arena platformer but with a gothic horror theme.** You play the role of a chunky, scary-eyed man armed with a baseball bat, who goes around beating up monsters and ghouls in single screen levels. Clubbing demons, ogres or fire-breathing wizards causes them to fly backwards, and the aim is to chain kills together by forcing enemies to collide into one another.

What really lets *Dark Tower* down is the generic and unimaginative feel of it all. There is nothing here you wouldn't have seen or played or even heard before. Some of the enemy sprites are taken from Capcom games, including *Ghosts'n Goblins*, and the music and sound effects from *Double Dragon*. Now this could be forgiven if the gameplay was original, or at the very least tried to do something a bit inventive, but it just doesn't do either.

As we said, it's just a *Bubble Bobble* clone, and there's nothing much to say about that. Struggling to find anything nice to say about *Dark Tower* then, it's our best left this month.


PC Engine



The Evolution of the PC Engine

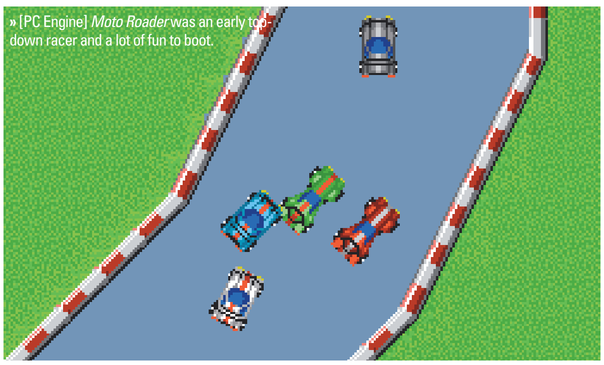
NEC's PC Engine recently turned 25. Damien McFerran takes a look back at a quarter century of cult gaming and examines the three key pieces of hardware that helped define the cult console

It stands as testament to the enduring appeal of the PC Engine that people still speak so highly of it today, despite the fact that its presence outside of Japan was almost non-existent. Its North American debut – as the TurboGrafx-16 – was a costly failure, and it never launched officially in Europe at all. In the West, the console was caught in the monstrous slugging match between Nintendo's SNES and Sega's Mega Drive, and ultimately got hopelessly lost in the crush. Contrast this sorry situation with what occurred in Japan, and you begin to get an understanding of why NEC's machine is so revered; released in 1987 – during a period of dominance for Nintendo's Famicom – the 8-bit PC Engine was a massive technological leap, using Hudson Soft's amazing 16-bit graphical hardware to offer arcade-quality visuals which put the Famicom's output to shame.

Although it never managed to challenge Nintendo's user base in Japan, the PC Engine did become the nation's best selling console shortly after release and would maintain its runner-up position well into the Nineties – even after Sega launched its 16-bit Mega Drive. The PC Engine's popularity in its homeland and long list of impressive coin-op conversions brought it to the attention of gamers in the West, triggering the dawn of a new era of 'grey importing' which would carry through well into the next decade.

While many take issue with the policy of modern manufacturers to constantly revise their hardware to drive sales, few companies in the history of videogaming have been quite as keen to evolve their systems as NEC. In total, twelve different hardware variants were produced from 1987 to 1994, and NEC was the first Japanese hardware manufacturer to exploit the storage potential of CD-ROMs on a games console, with 1988's PC Engine CD-ROM² attachment. Possibly the most impressive feat of engineering was NEC's decision to scale down its domestic hardware and cram it into a portable device, dubbed the PC Engine GT. Unlike its rivals the Game Boy and Game Gear, the GT ran the exact same software as its home console relation. For a collector, the PC Engine brand represents both a daunting challenge and an intoxicating adventure; amassing a 'complete' collection of consoles is not a task to be taken lightly.

If NEC's rise to fame was startling and unexpected, its fall from grace was equally shocking. The company failed to transition successfully into the 32-bit era, and foolishly put its weight behind Full Motion Video with its PC-FX system. Hopelessly underpowered when compared to the likes of the Sega Saturn and Sony PlayStation, the PC-FX was a complete disaster, effectively ending NEC's status as a serious player in the gaming hardware arena. Around the same time the company ended its long and fruitful relationship with Hudson Soft, and quietly retreated back to its core consumer electronics and IT businesses. However, although NEC may have abandoned the interactive entertainment arena and Hudson Soft may have ceased to exist (the company was swallowed up by Konami a short time ago), the legacy of this unique partnership lives on in the PC Engine family.

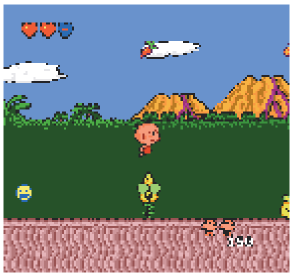


» [PC Engine] *Moto Roader* was an early top-down racer and a lot of fun to boot.




PC Engine

The origins of NEC's minature marvel begins here



» [PC Engine] *PC Genjin* was NEC's answers to Nintendo's Mario games.

To get a feel for the remarkable impact the PC Engine made upon release you have to take a look at the Japanese games market in 1987. Nintendo's vice-like grip on the industry was near-unbreakable, and the Kyoto giant enjoyed a similarly tight hold on the nation's best third-party developers, strapping them down with contracts which prevented them from releasing their most popular titles on rival formats. Sega's Mark III console – which would be launched in the West as the Master System – barely registered as a challenger, despite the company's fame as a purveyor of coin-op hits. Nintendo was the only game in town as far as Japanese players were concerned.

Clearly the difficult nature of the market didn't dissuade NEC and partner Hudson Soft from realising their ambition of creating a new piece of gaming hardware. The timing of this partnership was extremely fortuitous; NEC had seen Nintendo's success and was keen for a slice of the pie, while games developer Hudson had created its own chipset – dubbed the HuC6280 – but lacked the manufacturing muscle to put it into a console. The two companies decided to collaborate, and the iconic white PC Engine hit Japanese store shelves on 30 October, 1987.

Easily one of the most attractive pieces of gaming hardware ever made, the original '87 white PC Engine still looks appealing even by today's standards. With dimensions of 14 cm × 14 cm × 3.8 cm, it's still officially recognised as the smallest games console of all time. Within that sleek snow-white casing lay a beast which would outclass the Famicom in every way imaginable; it boasted 16-bit graphics hardware with 256 colours on-screen at once, a six channel sound chip and credit-card sized media for games – known as HuCards in Japan and TurboChips in the US.

However, having better hardware was only one part of the whole equation. NEC now needed killer games to sell its console, and due to Nintendo's aforementioned stranglehold over developers, that proved harder than expected. Initially, Hudson Soft itself provided many of the console's best games, but soon Famicom supporters like Namco, Irem, Taito and Konami broke rank and started to release their headline software on the PC Engine, while companies like Capcom and Sega licenced their arcade hits to NEC for conversion in-house. The results were electrifying; the PC Engine ports of *R-Type, Rainbow Islands, Outrun, Space Harrier, Splatterhouse, Gradius* and *1943* set new standards of visual and aural quality, leaving Famicom software looking distinctly second-rate by comparison.

NEC didn't wait long before revising its main system, with the PC Engine CoreGrafx and PC Engine Shuttle both following in 1989. In the same year the company would make its first serious error with the release of the SuperGrafx, an attempt to create a more powerful version of the console in order to compete with the Sega Mega Drive, which had been released in Japan the previous year. Essentially a PC Engine with an additional video chip and four times the amount of RAM, it was backwards-compatible with existing software but was such a flop that it only saw five exclusive games (a sixth, *Darius Plus*, was a dual-format hybrid which also ran on the standard PC Engine) before quietly being shelved. The popularity of the PC Engine brand allowed NEC and Hudson to swiftly overcome this setback, but it served as a worrying omen for future hardware mistakes.

Given the system's success in Japan and its vast catalogue of arcade hits, the decision to launch the PC Engine in the US came as no real surprise. Rechristened the TurboGrafx-16 and

Notable PC Engineers
Pack-In-Video



■ This obscure Japanese developer published several games for the PC Engine, including the licenced games *Die Hard* and *Knight Rider Special*, but started out by releasing titles for the Famicom and MSX. Little is documented about the history of the company, and this is likely due to the fact that its games were largely catered to the Japanese market and few saw release outside the territory. The company in its pack-in form no longer exists, having been merged with Victor Entertainment (a subsidiary of JVC) in 1996.







» Adverts for the PC Engine were suitable surreal. This one is particularly weird.

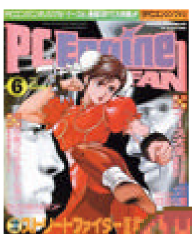


» NEC continually repackaged its machine, meaning there are many variations.

The difficult nature of the market didn't dissuade NEC and partner Hudson Soft







» *PC Engine Fan* was a popular magazine for NEC's console.



redesigned to feature a larger, more imposing case, the console would quickly find itself thrown into an epic struggle between Nintendo and Sega. As was the case in Japan, Nintendo was the company to beat, with the NES proving to be insanely popular. Again, the same issue regarding third-party software occurred, but with less-than-impressive hardware sales, few developers were willing to upset Nintendo in order to produce software for the TurboGrafx-16 – which could only offer a small fraction of the kind of profits the NES could. In a cruel twist of fate, Hudson was unable to release some of its best games Stateside because it had already produced them for the NES. Although the hardware stuck around for a few years on North American soil, it never achieved the same level of success that it enjoyed in its homeland.

Interestingly, one of the regions where the PC Engine gained a significant amount of exposure was Europe – most notably the UK. Spurred on by in-depth features in magazines such as *ACE* and *Computer & Video Games*, gamers who were bored of their Spectrums and C64s kick-started a demand for import hardware and software, with NEC's diminutive console becoming a firm favourite. Soon after its release in 1987, you could walk into almost any independent UK videogame retailer and find PC Engine games sitting proudly on the shelves.





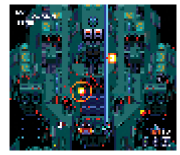




The allure of new technology coupled with the high quality of the arcade ports and the appeal of playing something obscure – created the ideal environment for the PC Engine to grow its fan base in the UK. As former Hudson Entertainment president John Greiner would admit in our interview with him in **Retro Gamer** issue 40: "Europe was neglected as this was NEC's first foray into the console market. However, there was considerable grey market penetration as Europeans also wanted to participate in the new gaming revolution."

Five Essential PC Engine Games

SOLDIER BLADE



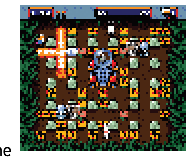
■ The PC Engine is no stranger to amazing 2D shooters, but this effort has to rank as one of the finest. Launched relatively late in the life of the system it offers fast action, massive sprites and tough, unrelenting gameplay, making for a thrilling blast which honestly wouldn't be out of place on a 32-bit system. The previous *Soldier* titles – including *Super Star Soldier* and *Final Soldier* – are also worth a look, as is spiritual prequel *Gunhed*.

STREET FIGHTER II DASH



■ The critics said it couldn't be done but Capcom proved them wrong. This is a superlative conversion of the world's most famous one-on-one brawler, and compares very favourably with the SNES and Mega Drive ports from the same period. Delivered on a huge 20-Megabit HuCard, the game was even blessed with its own six-button controller – an essential accessory if you're going to make the most out of one of the PC Engine's crowning technological achievements.

BOMBERMAN '94



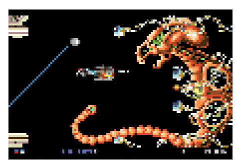
■ *Bomberman* may have experienced success on other consoles such as the SNES and Saturn, but his true home is arguably the PC Engine – which is ironic when you consider the system can only offer multiplayer via an additional accessory (it only has one controller port). This didn't stop Hudson's famous arsonist from carving out a solid reputation on the format, with this third outing proving to be the cream of the crop. It's easy to find these days and relatively inexpensive.

GALAGA '88



■ Namco's ancient shooter may seem like an odd choice when you consider the rich and varied selection of blasters PC Engine owners have to choose from, but it's proof positive that sometimes the most focused game concepts are the best. The basic visuals and sparse sound hide some surprisingly challenging gameplay, and the controls are tight and responsive. Namco would deliver sterling support for NEC's console during its lifespan, with this being a high point.

R-TYPE



■ Many PC Engine lovers will cite this arcade conversion as the piece of software which convinced them to lay down the cash for the machine. Considered by many to be the best port ever of Irem's seminal side-scroller, *R-Type* had to be divided across two HuCards (the later CD version united them in one package), but even with this limitation, it remains essential. Time may have dulled its impact, but it still makes a striking impression even by today's standards.

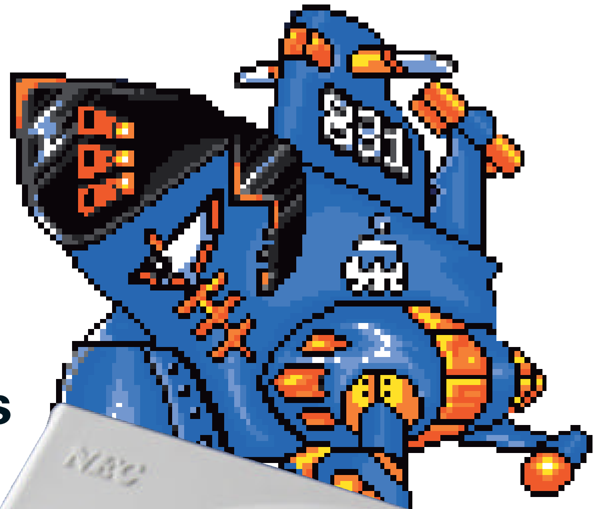


» The PC Engine's pad is just as cute and dinky as the actual machine.

PC Engine CD-Rom²

NEC brings CD gaming to the masses







During their partnership, NEC and Hudson would actively push for innovation within their products. The raw power of the PC Engine was proof of this fact, but arguably the most impressive achievement was bringing CD-ROM storage to the realm of videogames. The PC Engine CD-ROM² attachment launched in April 1988, and marked the first time that those shiny discs had been used to store videogame data on a home console.

Like so much fledgling tech, the attachment wasn't an immediate success. The system's paltry allocation of 64K of DRAM meant that the games were often inferior to standard HuCard releases, and the only enhancements were extended but superfluous cartoon-style introduction sequences and CD-quality audio. The CD-ROM² instead banked on its cosmetic appeal; the attachment and PC Engine console linked using a special briefcase-style contraption which looked stunning and lent the hybrid system a semi-portable quality.



The key to unlocking the true potential of the format came in the shape of System Cards. These HuCard-sized slabs of plastic slotted into the PC Engine's cartridge port and augmented the system's RAM. Five different System Cards were released in Japan, each one offering more potential for the medium. A turning point was the introduction of the Super System Card 3.0, which heralded a new wave of amazing CD software and finally allowed the format to live up to its tantalising potential. This was followed by the Arcade Card, which allowed replications of SNK fighters such as *Fatal Fury 2* and *Art Of Fighting* – a stunning achievement when you consider the gulf in power between the PC Engine and SNK's own Neo Geo hardware.



» There were only a few PC Engine magazines available to complement the machine.

In 1991 NEC fused the hardware to create the PC Engine Duo, an all-in-one system which could play HuCards and CD-ROM games without the need for System Cards (although the Arcade Card – launched after the Duo – was required to play compatible software). By creating a single hardware solution NEC was able to stay ahead of Sega's Mega Drive and Mega CD combo, which had to purchased separately at an exorbitant cost to the user. Such savvy manoeuvring also allowed the system to buck the trend of poorly-performing CD-based systems – while competitors like the Mega CD, CDi and Amiga CDTV struggled to justify their existence to consumers, in Japan the PC Engine Duo was reasonably successful.



Further hardware revisions followed, including the Duo-R and Duo-RX – the latter of which shipped with a six-button pad which would later be borrowed for the abortive 32-bit PC-FX system – and the Duo was even released in the States, under the name TurboDuo. NEC and Hudson established Turbo Technologies Inc. (TTI) to oversee the North American operation, but it was too late to make a real impact. By the time the TurboDuo was released into US stores, Sega and Nintendo's titanic struggle for supremacy was reaching its zenith, and the contest between Mario and Sonic drowned out the interesting developments being made by rival hardware. A dire advertising campaign – which feature a rotund bearded mascot called Johnny Turbo who did little more than moan about the Mega CD not being a 'real' CD-ROM console – sealed the deal, and the TurboDuo – and TTI with it – soon abandoned the lucrative American market.

Before the birth of the 32-bit era, the public attitude towards CD-ROM software was muted. Crude technology and developer inexperience led to vacuous games that made little constructive use of the massively expanded storage space, and early CD-ROM titles relied heavily on the impact of FMV to gain attention. While early PC Engine CD-ROM² games from the late Eighties contained very little that wasn't already possible on the standard console, the Super CD-ROM format brought with it some amazing advances. For arguably the first time in the history of the industry, the compact disc medium was put to truly



Notable PC Engineers Naxat Soft



■ Naxat released a number of popular titles for the PC Engine, mainly of the shoot-'em-up and sports variety. Arguably the developer's most popular and iconic donation to its users is the classic video pinball game *Dragon's Fury* (aka *Devil's Crush*), which debuted on PC Engine and TurboGrafx-16 before it was ported to the Mega Drive. The developer then went on to release games on the Super Nintendo and 3DO. Its final few releases before exiting the game space were TurboGrafx-16 rereleases on Virtual Console, under the name Kaga Create.



NEC and Hudson badly fumbled their move to the next generation

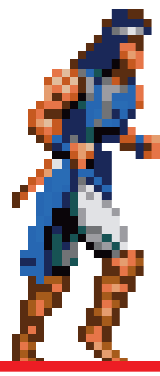
effective use, melding together amazing music, speech and animated sequences with gripping gameplay and vast level designs.

The likes of *Dracula X: Rondo of Blood, Gate of Thunder, Ys Book I & II* and *Spriggan* would go on to become classics, solidifying the PC Engine's status as a true gamer's system. These examples, along with many others, would lay down the accepted blueprint for CD-ROM development for the next half decade – instead of using the space on the disc for largely non-interactive video, Super CD-ROM games instead adapted it to complement traditional game design. Konami's legendary *Dracula X* benefited from a fantastic soundtrack and a branching level structure that would not have been possible on a HuCard.

It's ironic then that NEC and Hudson so badly fumbled their move to the next generation of videogaming. The PC-FX could have built on the Duo's fine work by adding in advanced 3D graphics, making it a match for the incoming Saturn, PlayStation and Nintendo 64 systems. Instead, the machine made the mistake that previous CD-based systems had done – it focused on video display quality. Admittedly, few consoles at the time were able to display FMV as well as the PC-FX, and games like *Battle Heat* represented the pinnacle of the genre, but the system's raw 3D capabilities were practically non-existent. Only 62 games made it to market, and the console was discontinued in 1998, after selling a paltry 100,000 units.



» [CD-Rom²] *Kaizo Chojin Schbibin Man 3* is considered to be the best in the series.



» [CD-Rom²] *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* remains hugely popular with *Castlevania* fans.



Five Essential PC Engine CD-ROM² Games



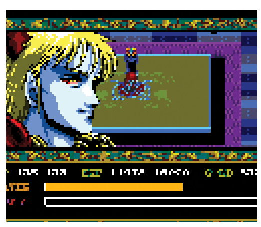
DRACULA X: RONDO OF BLOOD

■ *Dracula X* remained a Japanese exclusive until quite recently, when it was released as part of the *Dracula X Chronicles* on the PlayStation Portable. Even so, the PC Engine CD original retains its mystique and allure; the mixture of CD-quality music and gorgeous 2D visuals makes for an intoxicating brew, and the deep and engaging gameplay finishes the job.



SEIREI SENSHI SPRIGGAN

■ Produced by shooter expert Compile (Aleste), *Seirei Senshi Spriggan* is a vertically-scrolling shooter which doesn't do anything particularly special, yet offers the appealing gameplay and addictive challenge which has been a hallmark of the developer's previous output. As is the case with many of the more desirable PC Engine titles, price is a potential sticking point.



YS BOOK I & II

■ NEC's ambition to compete with the likes of Nintendo and Sega meant that the company needed to cover all of the bases – with RPGs being a particular focus. *Ys Book I & II* was one of the few games of its kind which managed to make it over to the US, where it was lavished with praise and accolades. The CD medium allowed for impressive cinematic cutscenes and a beautiful soundtrack.



LORDS OF THUNDER

■ The spiritual sequel to *Gate Of Thunder*, this fantasy-style horizontal shooter does away with genre conventions such as spaceships and aliens and instead uses mythical beasts as its focal point. If you need proof of just how graphically capable NEC's hardware was, you should check out this game. The eye-popping visuals are perfectly complemented by a raucous guitar soundtrack.



FATAL FURY SPECIAL

■ While support for the PC Engine Arcade Card was low on the ground, the potential of the add-on was proven beyond all doubt by conversions of some of SNK's most popular fighting games. *Fatal Fury Special* – an update on the second game in the series – which also received a release on the PC Engine – is possibly the most impressive, and really showcases how far the aging hardware could be pushed.





PC Engine GT

A console experience in the palm of your hand



When people discuss the history of the PC Engine lineage, one console which inevitably crops up is the GT. Considered to be the pinnacle of portable gaming in the early Nineties, this lavish device cost an absolute bomb when compared to its rivals, yet it provided an experience that was arguably far superior. Simply put, the GT was a PC Engine console in mobile form; it boasted the same internal tech as its home console brother, and even used the exact same games.

This was nothing short of a revelation back in the early days of handhelds. Although Sega's Game Gear was technically capable of running Master System software thanks to a rather unwieldy converter, it was a less impressive feat as Sega's 8-bit console was markedly inferior to NEC's machine. The slim, credit-card style HuCards also played a huge part in the system's appeal; you could carry around your entire collection in your pocket, and their diminutive nature seemed to suit the portable ethos perfectly. Even the Game Boy – which was considered by many to be the most mobile gaming system on the face of the planet – had larger cartridges, meaning you were less likely to leave the house with a pocketful of software.

The GT's processing power wasn't the only impressive feature it brought to the table. Rival devices like the Atari Lynx and Sega Game Gear were blighted by blurry LCD colour screens – first-generation efforts that made some fast-paced games almost unplayable. While the screen on the GT is primitive compared to what we have today on our phones and handhelds, back in 1990 it was considered best in show, offering striking colour and contrast with the bare minimum of motion blur during quick movement.

Like the Game Gear, the GT received a TV tuner which effectively transformed the console into a portable colour television. The tuner module also included RCA audio/video input, which meant that the machine could also double as a video monitor. This strong feature set made the GT a king in the handheld arena, but stamina was always a sticking point, just as it was with other colour portables of the period.

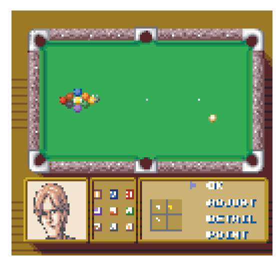
Six AA batteries would last around three hours, which was well short of the 12-hour lifespan the Game Boy boasted with two batteries less. Another problem was faulty capacitors; a common issue during the early Nineties, GT systems were fitted with low-grade capacitors which gave out with depressing regularity. As a result, many of the machines currently on the second-

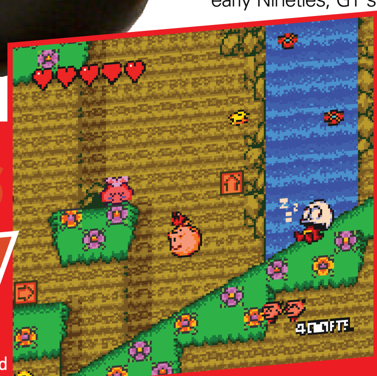












Notable PC Engineers Red Company

■ The company behind NEC console's bald headed caveboy mascot Bonk (known as PC-Genjin in Japan and BC-Kid in Europe), Red Company is another Japanese developer that was a very strong supporter of the PC Engine. Developing many of the *Sakura Wars* games for Sega, the company is still active, albeit under the slightly altered name of Red Entertainment, and continues to publish videogames to this day. Its most recent being the *Agarest* series of tactical role-playing games, which have appeared on the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3.





» You'll need plenty of cash if you want one of these beauties.

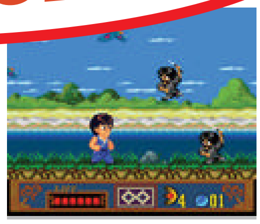


Five Essential PC Engine GT Games



BONK'S ADVENTURE

■ NEC's mascot may not have enjoyed the same global recognition as Sonic and Mario, but the games he starred in were just as appealing and enjoyable. Although the two HuCard sequels brought improvements, the original game – known as *PC Kid* in Japan – is possibly the most charming and straightforward. Bonk is a surprisingly endearing character, and benefits from taking a lead role.



JACKIE CHAN

■ Because of the console's small screen size, the GT was best suited to games with large, bold sprites. *Jackie Chan* certainly fits that bill; it boasts massive characters, including a surprisingly emotive representation of the world famous martial artist himself. Also released on the NES, this is one game which illustrates perfectly the technological gulf between the two systems.



OUTRUN

■ Although it's hard to believe, the NEC Avenue-produced port of Yu Suzuki's arcade racer is actually better than the one made by Sega itself for the Mega Drive console. It delivers all of the speed and challenge of the coin-op edition, somehow managing to cram it into the PC Engine's tiny frame. Another Sega conversion – Power Drift – was slightly less successful, but this is a stunner. It's not expensive these days, either.



SPLATTERHOUSE

■ Before *Resident Evil* shocked the world, Namco's *Splatterhouse* performed the same feat on the PC Engine. The gruesome arcade machine is impressively replicated on the 8-bit wonder; when placed side-by-side there are obvious discrepancies, but taken on its own, its hard to tell the difference from a gameplay perspective. The somewhat slow pace of the game makes it perfectly suited to the GT's screen.



SPACE HARRIER

■ Alongside the impressive achievement that is the PC Engine version of *OutRun*, this other conversion proves that NEC Avenue was not a one-trick pony. Again, the port is astonishingly faithful to the coin-op edition, and beats the Master System version in almost every respect. Another trait it shares with *OutRun* is its current market value – *Space Harrier* is available for less than ten pounds.

» [PC Engine] *Fantasy Zone's* bold colourful sprites were perfect for the GT's screen.



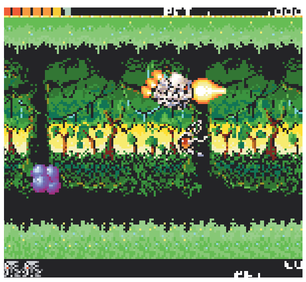
hand market suffer from weak sound, or no sound at all. This can be remedied by opening up the device and fitting new capacitors, but it's not a task to be undertaken lightly.

Possibly the most pressing problem with the GT was the little screen – although it was far better than anything else on the market at the time, its low resolution meant it wasn't great when it came to replicating detailed graphics such as small text boxes in certain games such as RPGs. Its small size also made it hard to play fast-paced shooters with small projectiles. As a result, you have to be very careful which titles you select for your GT. Games with a more sedate pace – such as scrolling platformers – tend to be a better choice, while frenetic blasters and RPGs are less successful on the system.

Despite its seductive design, massive software library and immense power, the GT wasn't a runaway commercial success. This didn't dissuade NEC from pushing out an even more extravagant mobile offering in the form of the PC Engine LT – a laptop-style version of the machine with a massive four-inch LCD screen. Portable in the loosest sense of the word (it had to be plugged into the mains), it marked perhaps the zenith of NEC's folly; although it was highly desirable, the market for such a device was minuscule and sales were predictably low. As a result, the LT was produced in small quantities and consequently commands lofty prices whenever it appears on sites like eBay.



» [PC Engine] *Atomic Robo Kid's* superb chunky sprites make it perfect for the PC Engine GT.



» [PC Engine] NEC's machine received a lot of support from Taito, with a string of fine ports.



» When you want to promote a new console in Japan, you get a bloke with a huge 'tache.

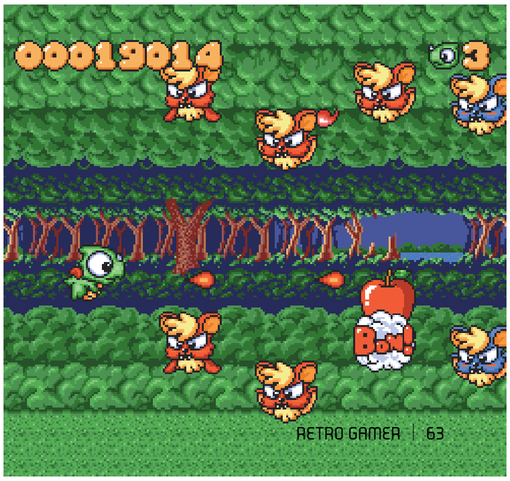


» NEC's portable machine could also receive TV signals.

The PC Engine GT made an impact on the history of mobile gaming that is disproportionate to its commercial performance. With companies like Nintendo, Atari and Sega all attempting to produce affordable mobile devices, NEC instead decided to go all out and create the best possible system it could. To get an idea of how stunning this achievement was, in modern terms it would be like Sony announcing a portable version of the forthcoming PS4 at the same time as the home console launch. Gamers had never experienced such raw power in the palm of their hands before, and although the next decade would be dominated by technological humble handhelds like the Game Boy Color, Neo Geo Pocket and WonderSwan, by the time 2004 rolled around, Sony's PlayStation Portable was effectively channelling the spirit of the GT by offering an experience which was only just shy of the PlayStation 2. A fitting testament to NEC's ambition for its micro marvel.



Special thanks to Aaron Nanto, who provided exclusive hardware photography for this feature.



Future Classic



Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come





INFO

- » **Featured System:** PC
- » **Year Released:** 2007
- » **Publisher:** Valve
- » **Developer:** Valve
- » **Key People:** Kim Swift (project lead), Gabe Newell (managing director, Valve), Erik Wolpaw, Chet Faliszek, Marc Laidlaw (writers)

GO DEEPER

- » **With the presence of Aperture Science, *Portal* is clearly set in the same universe as *Half-Life*.**
- » **The voice of GLaDOS, Ellen McLain, also voices Overwatch in *Half-Life 2*.**

28. PORTAL

The poster child for self-contained short form gaming experiences, Portal was a small and perfectly formed puzzle game, built around one brilliant mechanic

THE BACKGROUND

First came *Narbacular Drop*, a game built by a team of students who would later go on to create *Portal* – this project went down so well that Valve hired the entire team to expand on some of its ideas, the most crucial of which was the ability to create two portals to move between different parts of the environment. Valve is a relatively secretive developer when it comes to the actual process of making games, but it's interesting (and retrospectively obvious) that so many of the elements that were warmly received in *Portal* came directly from the personalities of the staff working on the title.

The game is intended as the story of robot overlord GLaDOS, rather than the protagonist, with *Portal* structured to be the beginning, middle and the end of the AI – charting her gradual descent into madness and eventual demise at the hands of the player. And at the climax of the game, this AI sings a song, with lyrics about cake and light dialogue about death. This sense of humour came from project lead Kim Swift and writers Erik Wolpaw, Chet Faliszek and Marc Laidlaw – Swift suggested the idea of the 'companion cube' that would become the iconic image of Portal, an arbitrary block with a heart on it. The song itself came from a collaboration with singer Jonathan Coulton, which was also based on Swift's suggestion, and also became a key component of *Portal*'s reputation.

Interestingly, *Portal* was initially just part of a larger package, the *Half-Life 2*-themed Valve compilation *The Orange Box*, but *Portal* would be singled out by some critics as the strongest product on the disc. It was later released separately from the package.

THE GAME

Portal is a an odd and hypnotic experience, a series of challenge rooms framed as a human experiment within Valve's quirkily presented world. Using a portal gun to move between two parts of the same environment, the three-or-so-hour arc sees Valve at

Things of note



The Brave Sequel

Portal 2 naturally doesn't feel as new as the original, but that's compensated for with some excellent storytelling and decent use of co-op play.



A Shade Of Orange

The Orange Box is one of the best-reviewed games of the generation, bundled as it was with *Portal*, *Team Fortress 2*, *Half-Life 2* and both DLC episodes of the latter game.



Still Alive

An enhanced edition with bonus levels, *Portal: Still Alive* is the ideal standalone package for a game best known as being part of a wider selection of titles.



This was a triumph...

Portal's climactic song really is a hilarious treat – and it's still just as simultaneously touching and funny today. *Portal 2* tried the same joke in a disappointingly unmemorable way.



Humour that works

How few games that try to be funny actually end up being funny? *Portal* is one of the few that makes it look effortless – and it was a unique sense of humour on display, too.



» **[PC]** The graffiti hints on the wall paint an interactive backstory to the game.

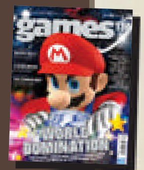


» **[PC]** Even at its toughest, you just can't give up on *Portal*.

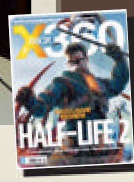


» **[PC]** *Portal* remains engaging and well-paced without the use of combat.

What the press thought



gamesTM
Score: 9/10
"However, there are only so many good words that need to be said about *Portal*: it's a short-lived masterpiece that, like everything else in *The Orange Box*, you simply must own."



X360
Score: 9/10
"Forgive us if we start like this: buy it, buy it, buy it, buy it. Yes, that'll do."



» **[PC]** The final boss encounter even features former Faith No More singer Mike Patton as one of the weird robot things you have to kill.

its most consistent when it comes to level design. Each puzzle is designed to test your physics and logic skills, except the changing nature of these challenges means that creativity must soon play a part, too, and it's that progressive approach to design that forms one tenet of why *Portal* is such a damned good game: this is not an easy genre to reinvent, but Valve managed it with typical flair.

The other breakthrough comes in story. The first part of everyone's *Portal* experience was firing two portals with this fancy new gun in front of and behind Chell, the protagonist, and staring down an infinity tunnel that had just been created. That feeling of gradually being pulled into this extraordinary world is echoed by *Portal*'s multi-layered narrative, which combines the discovery of minute details about the background of this backdrop with the comical psychological torment of sorts fired at the player by GLaDOS, Chell's captor.

Valve subtly merged two elements that are usually found in opposing types of games; the delicacy with which narrative is looped into these physics-based puzzles, how they adapt to the necessarily slow pacing of *Portal*, is admirably precise. The story is elevated far beyond being just an audiovisual theme for the puzzles, or a zany skin to carry the player along – it ended up getting much more critical dissection than the game's later ingeniously constructed puzzles.

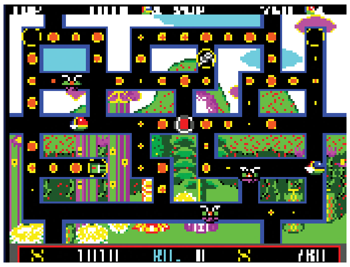
That's due to the fact that you spend the entire tale unsure of what exactly is going on, following a breadcrumb trail of obscure clues to GLaDOS's lair. *Portal* doesn't have a complicated story, but it's designed so you're always reconsidering your surroundings as you go, viewing every test as not just a logical challenge but a shard of the story. Like *Half-Life 2*, which forms a pastiche of various gaming genres but ultimately has its own creative voice, this represents a clever philosophy towards interactive storytelling that offers a snapshot of what many first-person games could be like in 20 years: cutscene-free, finding clever ways to represent characterisation that only this medium can pull off, and not being afraid to let the player piece together a story beneath the one being beamed to them by the developer.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

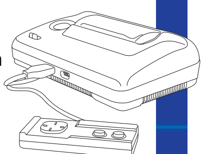
While it's by no means the first shorter form experience in videogames, *Portal* has certainly popularised the concept of an unashamed three to four hour arc that allows ideas to be conveyed without having to adhere to the format flabby, 12-hour £40 boxed titles. It was very much an experiment for Valve, another selling point for *The Orange Box* – yet *Portal* deservedly grew into something beyond that, becoming its own franchise that is now synonymous with the fusion of progressive narrative design and innovative 3D puzzles. *Half-Life 2* is the jewel in the crown for Valve, of course, yet *Portal* is the kind of game you'd show to someone who hasn't played anything since 1991, to demonstrate what the very best brains in the industry are capable of.

20 SEGA GAMES YOU'VE **NEVER** PLAYED

We look at some of the best Sega games that failed to get the attention they deserved. If you miss the glory days of the developer, then here are 20 games that will remind you why to be this good it takes Sega



Fantasy Zone: The Maze



Format: Master System
Year: 1987
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-house

If you're expecting a shooter like previous games in the series then prepare for disappointment. *Fantasy Zone: The Maze* (or *Opa Opa* as it was known in Japan) is actually a surprisingly enjoyable *Pac-Man* clone. Set against the backdrops of popular locations from the Fantasy Zone, you must collect all the onscreen coins while avoiding enemies. The nice touch here though is that said enemies spawn from an ever-filling portal and if you don't fly over it, more monsters are added to the fray. It's quirky but highly enjoyable all the same.



Cosmic Smash

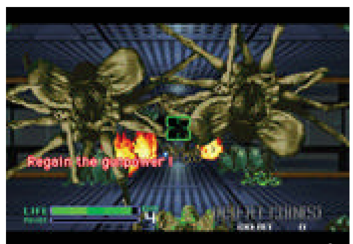


Format: Dreamcast
Year: 2001
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega Rosso

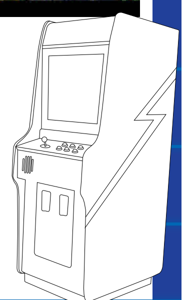
Simple but stylish is the best way to sum up this Dreamcast arcade conversion. Playing like a cross between *Squash* and *Breakout*, *Cosmic Smash* featured *Tron*-like visuals and mesmerisingly hypnotic gameplay. You're essentially placed in a futuristic squash court and must remove a set amount of blocks, initially with 80 seconds on the clock, before you can move to the next stage. Full of multiple routes, excellent music and a surprisingly complex two-button system, *Cosmic Smash* is a must-play game, which passed many people by due to it only appearing in Japan.

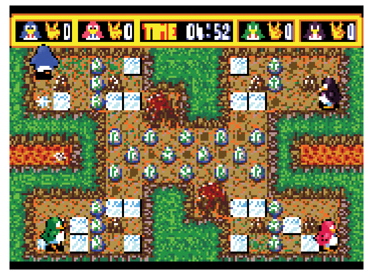
Alien 3: The Gun

Format: Arcade
Year: 1993
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-house



Making an arcade game based on the plot of *Alien 3* sounds like a terrible idea. Sega thought so as well, so it decided to instead make up its own story. It's very loosely tied into Paul Fincher's film, but the plot's not important. What is important is that you get to spray bullets into all sorts of nasty xenomorphs as you make your way through gloomy corridors and scary open spaces. There's a nice variety to the different aliens you encounter and they often attack in swarms, meaning you'll ideally want to play through with a friend. It may have a colour palette as gloomy as Fincher's movie, but it's great fun to play.



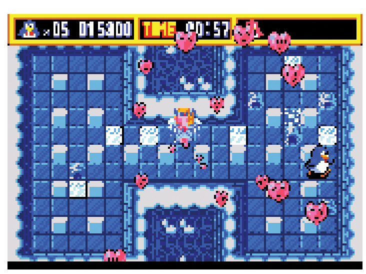


Pepenga Pengo



Format: Mega Drive
Year: 1995
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-house

Pepenga Pengo was only released in Japan, meaning many Mega Drive owners sadly won't have experienced it. This is a pity as it's an excellent little puzzler that massively improves on the arcade original. *Pepenga Pengo* introduces power-ups, cute bosses, and a new and improved co-operative mode (the original had two players taking alternate turns) that makes clearing later stages far easier. Spread across ten worlds, *Pepenga Pengo* is an excellent update that greatly improves on the original game. It also features the original arcade game and an excellent *Bomberman*-style battle mode that can support up to four players.



Panzer Dragoon Saga





Format: Saturn
Year: 1996
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Team Andromeda

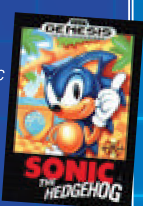
While many will have heard of Saga, we'd bet that you've not experienced it. Released late in the Saturn's lifetime, it limped into PAL land as the Saturn was in its final death throes, and as a result received an extremely limited print run. The same thing happened Stateside, meaning English copies now tend to command insane prices. We'd support shelling out though as *Panzer Dragoon Saga* is a staggeringly good game. Unlike the first two games in the series, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* is an RPG, and consists of sections where you're flying your dragon or running around as protagonist Edge. The combat uses a stylish battle system that features dramatic sweeping camera angles and revolves around three action gauges. Experience points are also earned, which allow your dragon to morph into a number of different forms. With the recent revelation that the original source code has been lost, we'd suggest you seek out a Saturn original rather than wait for a re-release that may never come.

SEGA FACTS YOU MAY NOT KNOW



As well as Nintendo, Sega was also in talks with Sony to collaborate on a new console. *Virtua Fighter* is also said to have played a big factor in convincing Sony to leverage the architecture of the PlayStation towards 3D technology.

The name Sega stands for SErvice GAmes, and the company was originally based in Honolulu, Hawaii.



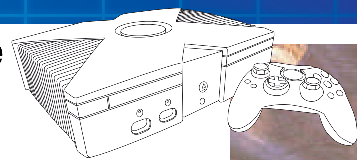
The famous Sega load up voice chant debuted in *Sonic The Hedgehog*, and was only created by Sonic Team to fill space on the rom.

Shenmue and *Shenmue 2* are two of the most expensive games Sega ever made, with a combined cost of over $100 million.

Sega created the first ever stereoscopic 3D video game, *SubRoc-3D*, which was released in arcades in 1982.



Gunvalkyrie



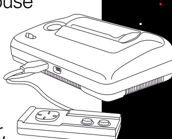
Format: Xbox
Year: 2002
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Smilebit



Although it's a highly westernised console, there were plenty of hidden gems on Microsoft's Xbox. One such example is the highly underrated *Gunvalkyrie* from Smilebit, which was originally planned for release on Sega's Dreamcast. It's worth noting though that like *P.N.03* (another misunderstood gem from around the same time period) *Gunvalkyrie* is certainly not an easy game to master. This is mainly due to its complex control system that has the left stick controlling movement, while the right handles aiming. Clicking the left stick lets you boost in the air for a short period of time, while clicking the right allows you to make useful quick-turns. It feels clunky at first and horribly awkward when walking, but once you master the boost system it turns into a completely different game, giving you graceful control over your mech suit and letting you zip around stages without ever touching the ground. This in itself is incredibly useful, because *Gunvalkyrie* is swarming with deadly insects and gigantic bosses that need to be taken down as quickly as possible. It's like the videogame equivalent of *Starship Troopers* and is a classic arcade-styled blaster that gives more the more you put into it.

Galactic Protector

Format: Master System
Year: 1988
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-house

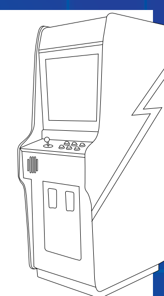






Another Master System game starring *Fantasy Zone*'s Opa Opa. This time, however, it didn't make it outside of Japan, due to it requiring the Paddle Control which was also exclusive to the region. Taking control of Opa Opa, you must circle a planet and protect it from being hit from incoming space debris. It's a fast and frantic game that's built around the rare peripheral.

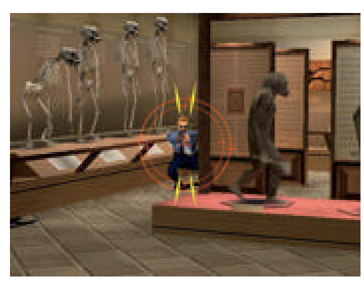
Confidential Mission



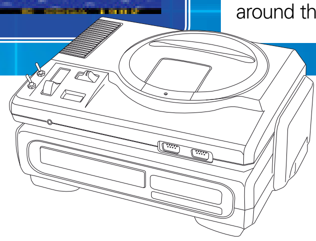
Format: Arcade
Year: 2000
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Hitmaker

Confidential Mission is, in our opinion, one of Sega's most underrated light gun games. Sitting in the shadow of *House Of The Dead* and *Virtua Cop*, its knowingly corny spy theme and variety of stages are what helps to separate it from its more famous peers. Based around a mission to retrieve a stolen satellite, *Confidential Mission*'s levels take you to some varied and amusing locales that feature branching sections, inventive enemy attack waves and quick-time events that test not only your aim but your firing speed. The game later received a really good Dreamcast port that added a sizeable Training Mode to practice aiming, justice shoots and combo-chaining.





Panic!



Format: Mega CD
Year: 1993
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-house





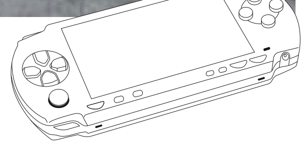
Surely one of the strangest games ever designed, *Panic!* (aka *Switch!*) finds a boy and his dog on a mission to destroy a virus that is causing all the machines in the world to malfunction – making switches potentially deadly. *Panic!* is basically a trial-and-error point-and-click game where there is no way to determine the outcome of your actions and no real consequence if they're wrong – other than getting to watch an amusing animation. It's an interactive cartoon, a series of scenes where in each you are presented with a choice of buttons and must try to guess the correct one to press to progress to the next scene. Bonkers, but the humour and animations ensure it's always entertaining.

Initial D: Street Stage

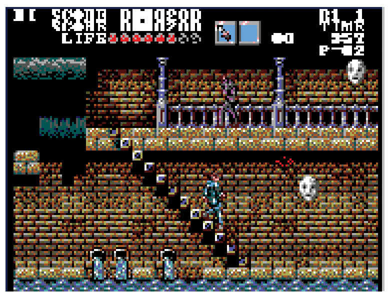


Format: PSP
Year: 2006
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega AM2

Based on a popular manga series, the Initial D franchise is virtually unheard of outside of Japan, due to Sega not releasing any home console releases in Europe. While it's been released on numerous consoles (typically Sony ones) it's the PSP version that beats the others, and is certainly the one we would recommend. It's an excellent arcade racer, with superb handling and a neat tuning mechanic that revolves around the use of trading cards. Although the game is in Japanese, the Asian version boasts an English manual. It's actually surprisingly pretty easy to understand, regardless, with the language barrier hardly an issue in playing the game; you can simply enjoy one of the best racers to be found on Sony's handheld.

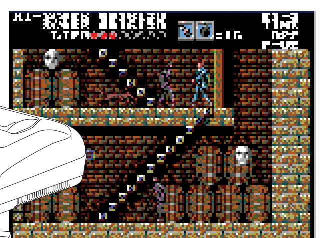


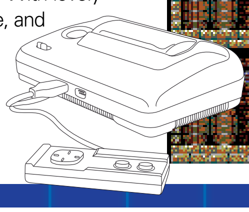
Master Of Darkness



Format: Master System
Year: 1992
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sims

Seen by many as the Master System's *Castlevania*, this action platformer shares a number of parallels with Konami's revered horror series. You play the role of a psychologist trying to get to bottom of a spate of grisly murders. This investigation takes him to several spooky locations, including a cemetery, castle and a house of wax, and sees him battling vampire bats, zombies and evil spirits. With lovely detailed graphics, bags of atmosphere, and a nice variety of weapons, enemies and bosses, *Master Of Darkness* is a hidden gem in the SMS library as, appearing quite late in its commercial life, few gamers got to experience it.





Ghost Squad



Format: Arcade
Year: 2004
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega AM2

Sega was a king of the light gun genre, and anyone who thinks otherwise is clearly wrong, or wouldn't know a good light gun game if it was wearing a neon cat suit and bit them on the eyeball. Sega made the genre theirs by blending character and humour with exhilarating setpieces, and in doing so helped breathe life into the genre. *Ghost Squad* is one of its later offerings to the genre. Cut from a similar cloth as *Virtua Cop* and *Confidential Mission*, the cops and spies give way to a military *Ghost Recon*-esque theme, with players leading a team of special op types. Its mission comprised of three stages that comprised branching segments and mini-objectives (similar to *Confidential Mission*), while the cabinet had a hefty gun that offered various fire types. An arcade follow-up, *Ghost Squad Evolution*, came in 2007. It featured new stages and a gun with even more functionality, now allowing you to actuate hand-to-hand combat attacks and enter Night Vision mode. *Ghost Squad* eventually saw a late home conversion for the Wii (as too did Sega's *Gunblade* series) courtesy of Polygon Magic, it bolstered the game's arcade mode with additional play modes, including four-player support, and a bevy of weapons and amusing costumes to unlock.



OutRun 2019



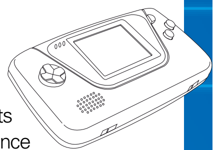
Format: Mega Drive
Year: 1993
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sims

The Mega Drive conversion of *OutRun* was mediocre. Its port of *Turbo OutRun* was utterly shambolic. So where do you go for a good *OutRun* fix on the console? Well, we'd recommend *OutRun 2019*. As its title unsubtly implies, this sort-of sequel placed the racing in the (now not so far-flung) future with vehicles capable of reaching silly speeds. The standard forking stages and checkpoint-chasing gameplay remains, but is spread across four different courses. Detailed visuals, a catchy soundtrack, a comfortable difficulty, solid controls and speed make it by far the best *OutRun* games on the Mega Drive, and there's not a pretty blonde girl in sight.



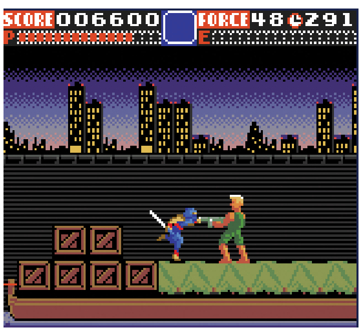


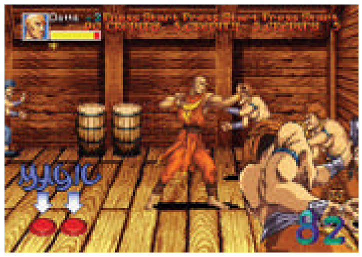
Ninja Gaiden



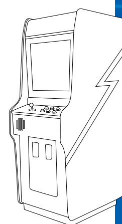
Format: Game Gear
Year: 1991
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Biox

After acquiring the rights of the *Ninja Gaiden* licence from Tecmo for its machines, Sega put three different games into development, one each for the Master System, Game Gear and Mega Drive. The Mega Drive game never saw release (though roms of the partially finished code are online), but the 8-bit games did – although only the SMS in Europe. Both are worth seeking out, but it's the Game Gear version that we're highlighting here. It's a fast and ferocious side-scrolling action game with some nice level design and presentational touches, including some nicely animated cutscenes. With only a handful of stages, it is a bit on the short side, but there's no doubt that it captures the essence of *Ninja Gaiden* on the portable.





Arabian Fight

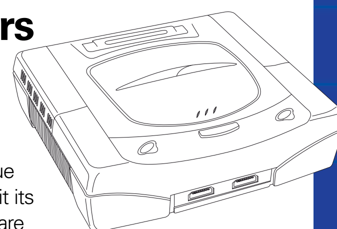


Format: Arcade
Year: 1992
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega AM2

Sega made a fair amount of scrolling fighters, but this fine effort from 1992 remains one of our favourites. *Arabian Fight* is designed for up to four players and boasts an Arabian theme. There's a straightforward three-button setup, similar to *Golden Axe*, while the four main characters actually play significantly different to each other, offering a fair amount of variety. You fight your way through the gorgeous looking stages that riff off all sorts of traditional Arabian, *One Thousand And One Nights*-esque tales. It makes our list, not only because it's an immensely satisfying brawler, but also because it features stunning scaling effects that made it stand out from many similar games of the time. It's not original by any stretch of the imagination, but its failure to secure a home port will mean that many won't even have heard of it.



Burning Rangers

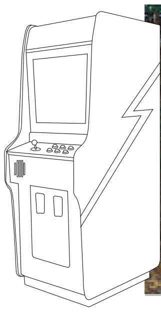


Format: Sega Saturn
Year: 1998
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team

There are some who would argue that Sega the game developer hit its prime during the last two hardware races it had a horse running in. For a number of reasons the Sega Saturn failed to ape the success of the Mega Drive, but its failure to strike as significant a chord with gamers wasn't down to Sega not trying, as its software library is evidence of. *Burning Rangers* was a very late release for Saturn. Released globally in 1998, the same year the Saturn was discontinued, few bought and experienced it at the time, and as a result it now commands some pretty steep prices. *Burning Rangers* is a third-person action game that stars two rookie firefighters tasked with entering flaming buildings, putting out fires and rescuing survivors. It employs a *Sonic*-style health bar system revolving around crystals, which are not only used to transport people to safety but also act like gold rings in Sonic; if you take a hit without carrying any, then you die. A unique and intense take on the third-person shooter genre, with stunning visuals (it was one of the few 3D games to make use of the Saturn's CPU-hungry transparency effects) and a rousing soundtrack by *NiGHTS Into Dreams*' composers Naofumi Hataya and Tomoko Sasaki, it is a terrific parting gift to the Saturn from Sega. Well worth seeking out.

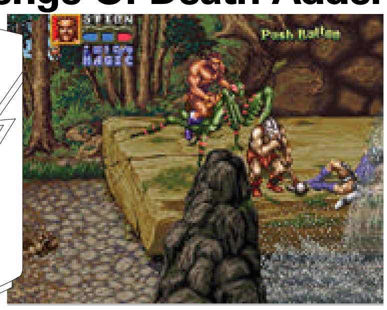


Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder



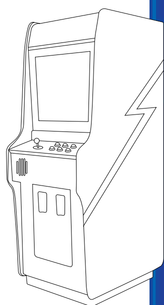
Format: Arcade
Year: 1992
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-house

This arcade sequel to Sega's *Golden Axe* is the best in the series. Why? Well it had enhanced visuals, sound and animation, multiplayer support for up to four players, branching stages and an impressive variety of different enemies and magic spells. It also made some slight changes too, the original magic system gets tweaked (you can no longer level up spells) and none of the original three heroes return, with the exception of Gilius who joins the party as an unplayable character. Instead, you got four (more interesting) heroes to lead into battle, comprising a barbarian, giant, elf and a centaurides. Shamefully ignored by Sega since its release, it remains an arcade exclusive, which is why few have played it.





The Typing Of The Dead

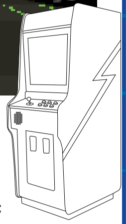


Format: Arcade, DC, PC
Year: 1999
Publisher: Sega
Developer: WOW Entertainment, Smilebit

A game that probably had most of us thinking Sega might have lost the plot, *The Typing Of The Dead* poked amusing fun at *House Of The Dead 2* by having players blow away zombies by typing words and phrases as they appeared on the screen. What can inarguably be described as the best zombie edutainment game starring of all time, *The Typing Of The Dead* debuted in arcades but later received ports to Dreamcast and PC. Naturally best played with the console's keyboard peripheral, and only released in Japan and North America, meant that few have experienced this quirky and humorous mod, which also spawned a Japan-only sequel.

A.B. Cop





Format: Arcade
Year: 1989
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-house

If you ever wondered what a *Hang-On* and *Chase H.Q.* petrol-headed baby would look like then you can stop imagining. This relatively obscure arcade release sees you play the role of a futuristic police officer tasked with pursuing fleeing alien criminals before the time expires. With fast, frantic gameplay and some attractive super scaling visuals, *A.B. Cop* isn't the deepest videogame on this list, but in terms of serving up some good old fashioned throwaway Sega arcade fun, it certainly delivers.

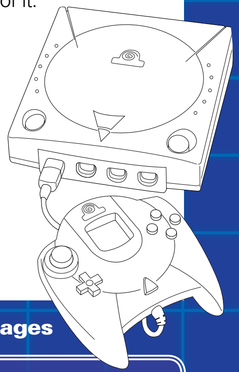
Segagaga



Format: Dreamcast
Year: 2001
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Hitmaker

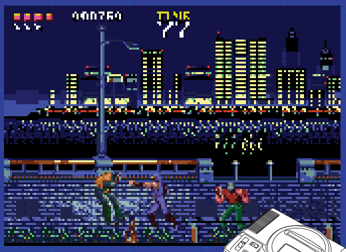
There aren't many videogame companies that will readily poke fun of themselves in order to make a videogame. Thank goodness then that Sega was fair game when it allowed Tez Okano to come up with this nutty tribute to all things Sega. The core plot of *Segagaga* sees the popular studio in drastic trouble due to the Dreamcast being a commercial failure. Sega only has 3% of the gaming market left and must take control back from the evil DOGMA and stop it from seizing the entire videogame market share. This is achieved by pulling random kids off the street in the hope that they'll be able to do a better job than Sega. Needless to say, you end up playing as one of those kids. *Segagaga* is a weird hodgepodge of different genres ranging from simulation to shoot-'em-up, but it's predominantly a RPG. There's a huge amount of Japanese text, making the game extremely hard going if you're not fluent, but you'll want to persevere with it because so much has been lovingly crammed into it. One moment you'll be working alongside a demoted Alex Kidd, the next you'll be battling caricatures of popular Sega developers, or getting a ride off Sonic the Hedgehog. It all finishes off with you blasting off into space in a prototype R-720 and shooting down all of Sega's previous consoles. A brave, impossibly nutty game that really has to be seen to be believed. Even if you don't understand a word of it.





Special thanks to Hardcore Gaming101 for help with images

SEGA GAMES THAT NEVER MADE IT

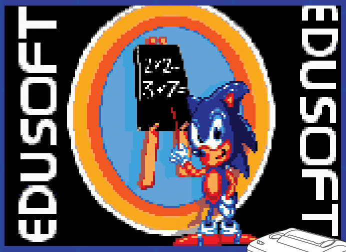




Ninja Gaiden

Format: Mega Drive
Developer: Sega

We mentioned it on page 70, but Sega actually got fairly far into its cancelled Mega Drive *Ninja Gaiden* game, to the extent that there is working rom dump of it online. Playing more like the original arcade game than the NES platformer series, it's a straight fisticuff brawler. The music and enemy AI is a bit off, but it's still an interesting curio.





Sonic's Edusoft

Format: Master System
Developer: Tiertex

During the 8-bit era, edutainment games were pretty prevalent. Nintendo carved out a whole series of them for the NES, and this is one of Sonic and Sega's lesser known contributions. Developed by Tiertex for the Master System, it sees Sonic competing against cartoon animals in literacy and numeracy challenges to earn stars to get through an overworld map.





Flash Point

Format: Mega Drive
Developer: Sega

Perhaps the *Tetris* licensing saga (Nintendo blocked sales of *Sega Tetris* as it held the home console rights) was why Sega chose not to release the port of this *Tetris*-alike, which sees players trying to clear block arrangements. *Flash Point* saw eventual release on the *Sega Ages 2500 Series Vol. 28: Tetris Collection*, joined by Sega/Sanritsu's *Tetris* and 1989 arcade game *Bloxeed*.





Sonic Crackers

Format: Mega Drive
Developer: Sega

Well in a way this *Sonic* prototype for the Mega Drive did sort of make it to shops. Its core gameplay mechanic, which sees Sonic and Tails chained together by rings, as well as two of its four levels formed the basis for *Knuckles' Chaotix* on the 32X. And the other two stages, which are isometric in perspective, are believed to have formed the basis of *Sonic 3D.*



Agony

BARN OWLS AS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN THEM BEFORE

» RETROREVIVAL

» AMIGA
» ART AND MAGIC
» 1992

Regular readers of the magazine will know that I'm not the biggest fan of Western shoot-'em-ups. While they often look fantastic, their gameplay, for me at least, rarely matches their aesthetic, often falling into obvious traps that Japanese developers are able to effortlessly avoid.

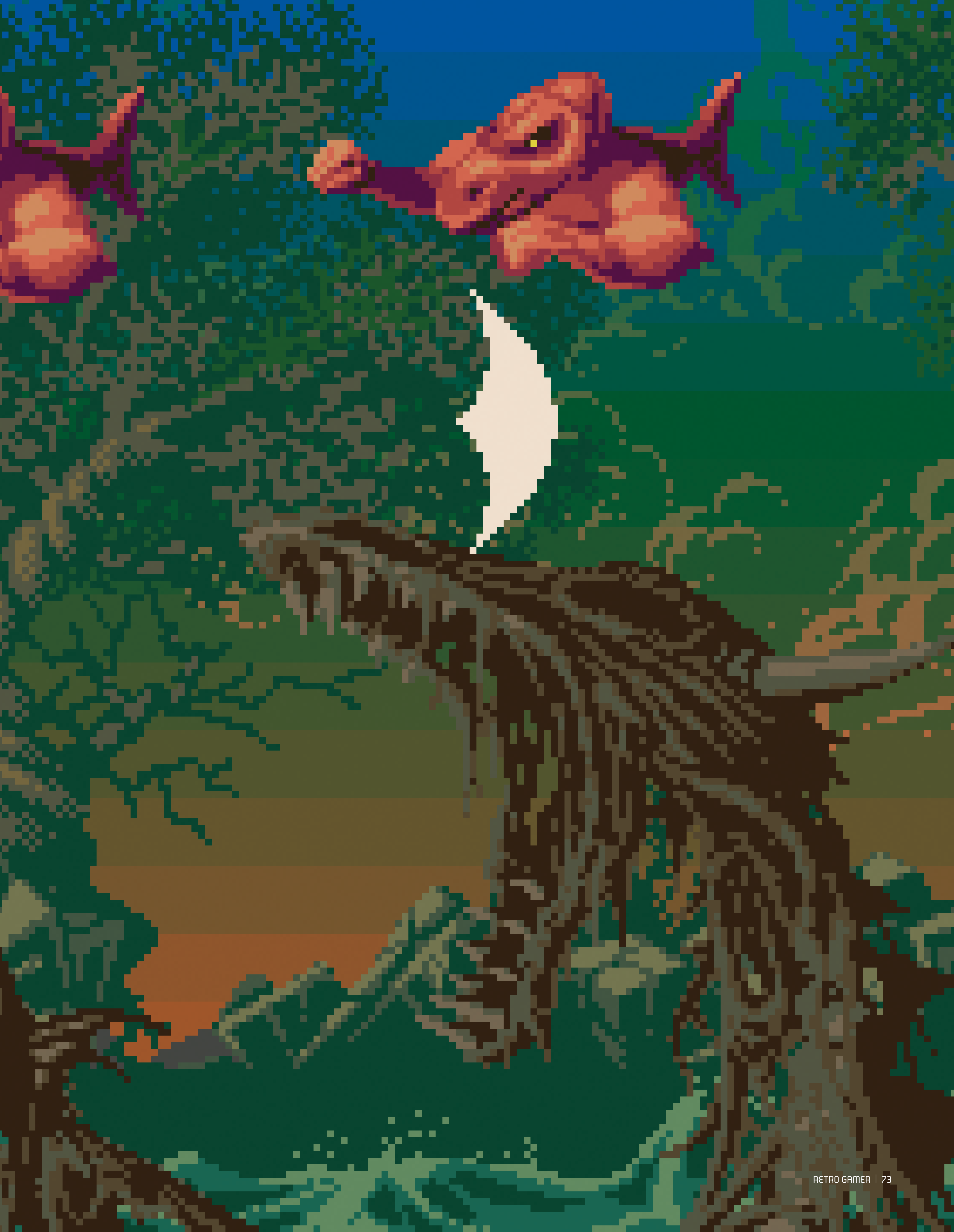
Agony is a game that really divides me, because while it's a truly stunning looking shooter, its gameplay, while far better than many of its peers, still can't hold a candle to Japanese shooters that were available at the same time.

The biggest issue with *Agony* is that your owl's hit box is simply far too big, making it extremely hard to dodge some of the larger enemies and certain bullets. Level loads are also an issue, eating into the excitement that the game offers when you do get to finally play it. Then there are the weapons, which are best described as puny, offering very little respite from the well-designed attack waves that constantly assault you.

And yet for all its niggles I've constantly found myself drawn back to Art And Magic's gorgeous looking game. Partly it's because it really does look lovely, featuring a graphic design that still makes it feel completely different from its peers. It sounds superb as well, with a list of talented musicians contributing to a wall of sound that slowly surrounds you as your owl avatar takes down anyone and everyone.

And then of course there's the owl itself. A physical embodiment of the Psygnosis logo, there's a regal majestic beauty to it that grants a connection you rarely feel in shoot-'em-ups. The design is solid, but certainly not spectacular, while the bosses are tough and weird enough to make a good impression. Solid and enjoyable is perhaps the best way to sum up *Agony*. It's very different to many other shooters that were on the Amiga at the time, while its loading screens look absolutely glorious.

It's not a patch on the similarly-themed *Apidya*, but you could do a lot worse than take *Agony* for a spin. And if your heart doesn't break when you see what happens to your lovable owl when it gets hit you're probably dead inside.



THE MAKING OF

RAMPART

One of Atari's last great arcade games, Rampart was also one of the finest competitive multiplayer games of its era. Mike Bevan talks trebuchets and tetrominos with designer John Salwitz

Billed as 'a game of strategy and skill', *Rampart* is one of the most unusual of Atari's many arcade titles; a dash of *Missile Command* mixed with the jigsaw-puzzle building elements of *Tetris*, wrapped up in a medieval castle setting. Designed primarily as a multiplayer game for up to three players, it's a simple but engaging premise. Take charge of a fort, populate it with cannons and then attempt to blow your opponent's castle into tiny splinters. Then between rounds, plug any gaps in your defences with awkwardly shaped tetrominos before the timer expires, in readiness for the next bout of medieval madness.

As a multiplayer game *Rampart* harks back to the Atari's classic *Warlords* in terms of straightforward, pick-up-and play appeal, with a surprising amount of depth beneath its admittedly minimalist facade. For the game's designers, John Salwitz and Dave Ralston, it was a project that derived from putting *Tetris*-style building blocks into an almost abstract game concept, a far cry from the pair's previous titles, *Paperboy* and *720°*.

"We really wanted to do a multiplayer competitive game, and of course *Tetris* was a huge title at that time," remembers John. "*Missile Command* has always been one of my favorite games and I know Dave is a big fan as well, but I think the idea of putting *Tetris* pieces in was later, an earlier influence, in particular for me was a game called *Cathedral*, which is a board game in which you trap territories on a board. It's really a wonderful game. And it is medieval themed but that's not really the point of it, it was more about *Tetris*-like pieces slotting together while you try to occupy as much territory as you possibly can. We had good prototype hardware so we were able to do good iterative thinking, so we just played with a bunch of concepts and started coming up with *Rampart*."

Taking a thematic spin from the *Cathedral* board game, the idea of using puzzle-pieces to build up castles started to gradually evolve. "The medieval setting really worked in terms of the composition of the pieces," says John. "I'm sure Dave had a whole lot to do with that. Dave has never been much into abstraction, you have to look at the kind of titles he's done over the years, he's always very much rooted in concrete and real things. I suppose we could have built the game with just abstract pieces but really from a thematic or story standpoint that just didn't hold. Both of us are certainly very influenced by construction and building, the game transforms from pure top-down 2D to a slightly isometric 3D, and the idea of doing that transformation was really appealing to us."



» *Cathedral*, the block-building board game which influenced John and Dave in the creation of *Rampart*.

> Like any good games company, Atari was completely populated by game players so it wasn't really a hard pitch
>
> JOHN SALWITZ

Surprisingly, and given the pair's track record in creating hits like *Paperboy*, Atari management green lit the comparatively bizarre design concept for *Rampart* without resistance. "Dave and I had a lot of luck in the Eighties at Atari," says John, "and we were privileged to be given the opportunity to do a lot of things that we wanted to do. When we pitched the project we knew it was going to be a short development cycle. The whole development cycle for *Rampart* was around nine months. *Paperboy* had been about two years, and *720°* and the first *Cyberball* were 18 months. It was not going to be expensive – the hardware was inexpensive bitmap hardware with standard controllers, and it was a relatively small team. We did some things that were reasonably smart in development, early on it was playable so other people could come in and play it, and in fact during its development it was played constantly. Like any good games company, Atari was completely populated by game players so it wasn't really a hard pitch."

And as with *Missile Command*, one memorable aspect of the original arcade game was the use of the Atari trackball controller, which gives the necessary fine control, especially when piecing together those pesky wall-plugging blocks. "The other thing that we wanted to do was finally build a trackball game," admits John. "We had done a game called *Akka Arrh* back in 1981 which was a trackball game that was never shipped. And of course *Paperboy* and *720°* weren't trackball games. I think there was a lot of stuff we really wanted to do over that period of time that we finally got to do in *Rampart*..."

One aspect of the game that John has already hinted at is the collaborative nature of its design, with various other Atari developers play testing and offering feedback as it came together. "John and Dave started working on *Rampart* after we did *Klax* so they were messing around with *Tetris* puzzle pieces and in their typical style they came up with a totally unique approach," recalls ex-Atari development manager Mark Pierce. "Peter Lipson, who was another programmer at the time and I started playing it every day at lunch and because we were building walls we became known as the 'wallboys'"

"I really liked *Rampart*," says Peter. "John and Dave were developing it in the lab right next to mine, so for break-time I would often wander in and play for a while. Mark was my major opponent; we worked on our trash-talking as much as on our skills and if I recall we could draw an audience to our games. John and Dave were in a creative hot streak, and their games got a lot of play during development."

"We used to laugh at how bizarre the game design was," Mark grins. "The whole puzzle piece building walls and cannon fighting stage... It's a very interesting game to me in how it worked out, and a lot of fun with a trackball. We were with them the whole time, it was a blast..."

"We would have put five players on there if we could have," says John, confirming how important the multiplayer aspect of the game was to him. "We'd have loved to have done a big top-down cabinet with a ton of players; it would have worked just fine. But we wanted *Rampart* to be an inexpensive multiplayer game – *Cyberball* was two screens and fairly expensive, so we were trying to find a way to bring the multiplayer play into a smaller package, and a smaller cabinet. Also, Atari was at that time really focused on trying to figure out how to get things to be cost effective, and of course when you put three players on a controller you get more coin drop." ▶



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI GAMES (ARCADE) ELECTRONIC ARTS (HOME VERSIONS)
- » **DEVELOPER:** ATARI GAMES
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE, SNES, LYNX, C64, GENESIS, NES, OTHERS
- » **GENRE:** ACTION/STRATEGY



» **[Arcade]** If you've no friends *Rampart* offers a single-player mode where you fend off waves of incoming ships.

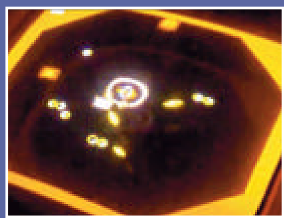


» **[Arcade]** Extending your walls to capture extra castles is a good tactic against a human opponent. Red looks in a spot of bother here.

THE MAKING OF

OTHER ATARI GAMES BY JOHN SALWITZ AND DAVE RALSTON

AKKA ARRH (1982)



John and Dave's first project together alongside Mike Hally, the *Akka Arrh* was a space-themed shooter which played like a cross between *Star Castle* and *Missile Command*. Deemed by Atari to be too complicated, it was never released, though a few cabinets do exist.

PAPERBOY (1984)



Notable for its famous 'handlebar' controller, *Paperboy* is an eccentric take on suburban Americana, with some nifty isometric graphics. And the challenge of cracking that perfect paper round, complete with a little light vandalism, is still good clean fun.

720° (1986)



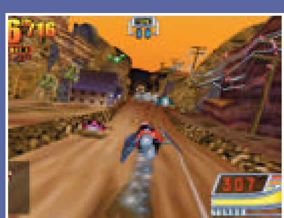
Inspired by the skateboard craze of the Eighties, this ambitious game gave you a whole playground of extreme events. As with *Paperboy, 720°* is no slouch when it comes to its control interface, using a unique joystick able to replicate the full motion of a 720° aerial spin.

CYBERBALL (1988)



It's the year 2072, where the great sport of American footie is now played by giant robotic quarterbacks. Effectively *John Madden*'s with cyborgs, *Cyberball* features all the plays and tussles you'd expect from American football with one notable modification: the ball's a bomb…

VAPOR TRX (1998)



After leaving Electronic Arts in 1995, John and Dave co-founded a new development house, Blue Shift Inc, with ex-Atari programmers Bob Flanagan and Doug Snyder. *Vapor TRX*, a *WipEout*-style futuristic racer, was the company's first arcade project.

> I certainly had the opinion that there was no way it would ever be a good joystick game…
>
> JOHN SALWITZ



▶ "For a while most people were playing it as a multiplayer game but any game in the arcade had to be able to survive as a single player game too, so first we figured out the multiplayer game and then we added on the single player game." This mode of the game is considerably different from the multiplayer version; instead of having separate castles blasting way at each other players must defend themselves from hordes of incoming ships and later, vicious castle-bashing grunt landing parties.

"We didn't really want to take on the burden of the AI for the computer building forts," explains John, "which would never have worked out very well anyway because it just wouldn't have played well against a computer opponent. Thematically it worked really well to have a kind of invading force and I'm sure Dave came up with the idea to have ships landing on there. And of course that's the more natural state for a castle – rarely do two castles actually fire at each other!"

John acknowledges the hidden depths of the game – the main strategic question in *Rampart* is whether players should expand their castle to add extra cannons, which can only be built within the walls, or limit their fort size to allow for easy maintenance but a possible additional pounding from opponents. "I love games that make you make trade-offs like that," he reflects. One additional tactic is the act of turning your cannons on your own castle, just enough to blast an easier to plug hole in your defences, because as the game goes on, the smaller, easier to fit pieces become much harder to come by.

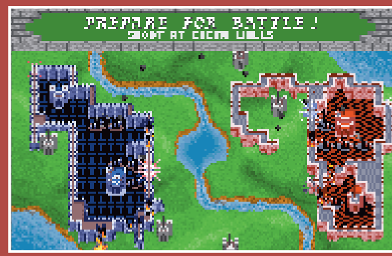
"I think the difference is that if you look at a game like *Tetris* it's actually a half competitive configuration because there are two parallel tracks with pieces dropping from the sky, and at Atari we were always looking at ways with which you could mess with the other person," says John, when asked about the thought process behind splitting the game into distinct attacking and defensive phases. "Dave and I are both big sports fans and in any sport there's typically kind of segmented play, particularly in American sports. When you think of turn-based gaming there's

THE PHASES OF RAMPART



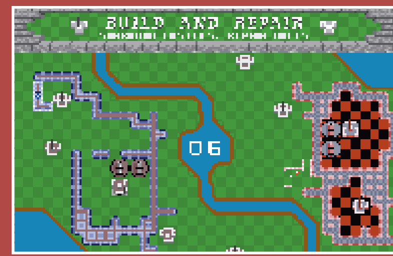
Place Cannons

Choose where to place your cannons, which can only be laid down in the chequered area enclosed by castle walls. Extending your walls to capture other forts on the map will give you more.



Prepare For Battle!

Aim your cursor *Missile Command*-style and let rip on the enemy fortress. The more cannons you have, the more shots you can fire at any one time, increasing the damage inflicted on the enemy.



Build And Repair

Time to survey the damage to your medieval abode… Plug any gaps in your walls with *Tetris*-style bricks, which can be rotated for an easier fit. Fail to do so before the timer runs and it's game over.

a rhythm to the game that is phase-based, so we were just borrowing some of those basic concepts."

"Also from a simplicity standpoint, if we had combined those two phases together so you fire immediately on the other guy as soon as you had surrounded an area it would have been very confusing because from a controller standpoint, what do you do with the cursor? The cursor in one phase is showing a piece and in the other a reticule or sight, so it made it very obvious that you wanted to separate those distinct phases. The game is at its best when there's the incredible tension of trying to fit that last piece in and your clock is ticking down, and that's just between you and the computer at that time, the game resolves itself into being just a simple puzzle game at that point, which I thought was very attractive."

Rampart was well received in arcades, where the deluxe three-player cabinet was supplemented by a less expensive two-player joystick version. There were also a number of conversions for the home market, of which the Super Nintendo and Atari Lynx versions are perhaps the most well known. "I certainly had the opinion that there was no way it would ever be a good joystick game," admits John. "As it turned out it was easy to turn into a joystick game, and there are certainly plenty of people that like it better that way. The trackballs we ended up using were fairly heavy and I'd still love to go back and tune a bit of the motion because *Rampart* is actually a fairly difficult game to get good at – there's a pretty steep early ramp line and a lot of that is probably due to the fact that the trackball isn't a very familiar controller to most people. And it would not have moved into the home market unless it was able to move as a joystick game."

"At the time the arcades were under a lot of pressure. Dave and I actually left Atari Games about a year after finishing *Rampart* to go to Electronic Arts because the arcade business was getting more challenging, and I was very sad to leave it. *Rampart* did reasonably well on home systems, in fact Electronic Arts did the conversion (at that time we had a group called Tengen that were involved in the conversion of coin-op games, which had become a very big part of the business.) I actually work at EA now and there's a wall of games and *Rampart*'s up on that wall, it wasn't a huge hit but it did well and I think it's still reasonably popular with a group of people."

Indeed, certain members of the **RG** crew have been known to have had heated and highly enjoyable *Rampart* multiplayer sessions into the early hours. In a recent Gamasutra feature industry veteran John Harris called it "perhaps Atari's last great game," adding, "it's my vote for the best designed video game ever made."

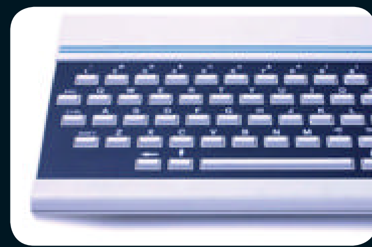
"I had a really wonderful experience at the California Extreme Gaming convention," says John, sharing a recent encounter with his creation, "a very large show in San Jose with a ton of pinball and videogames. I got the pleasure of sitting behind a line of people trying to play *Rampart*, just watching them play. The guys were really serious about playing it and were having a great time and, you know… that's just the greatest compliment in this profession that you can have…"

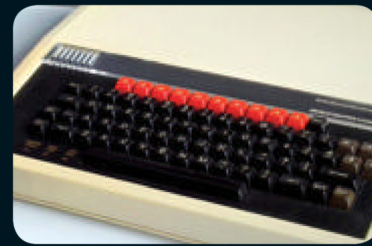


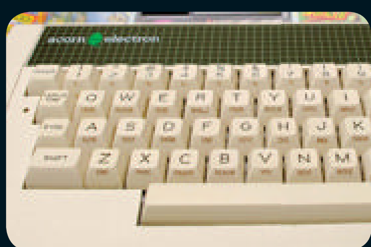
» **[SNES]** The excellent Super Nintendo port offered an enhanced quasi-3D perspective using mode 7 graphical trickery.

BACK TO BASIC





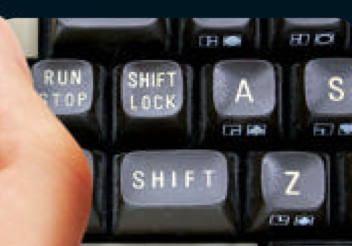




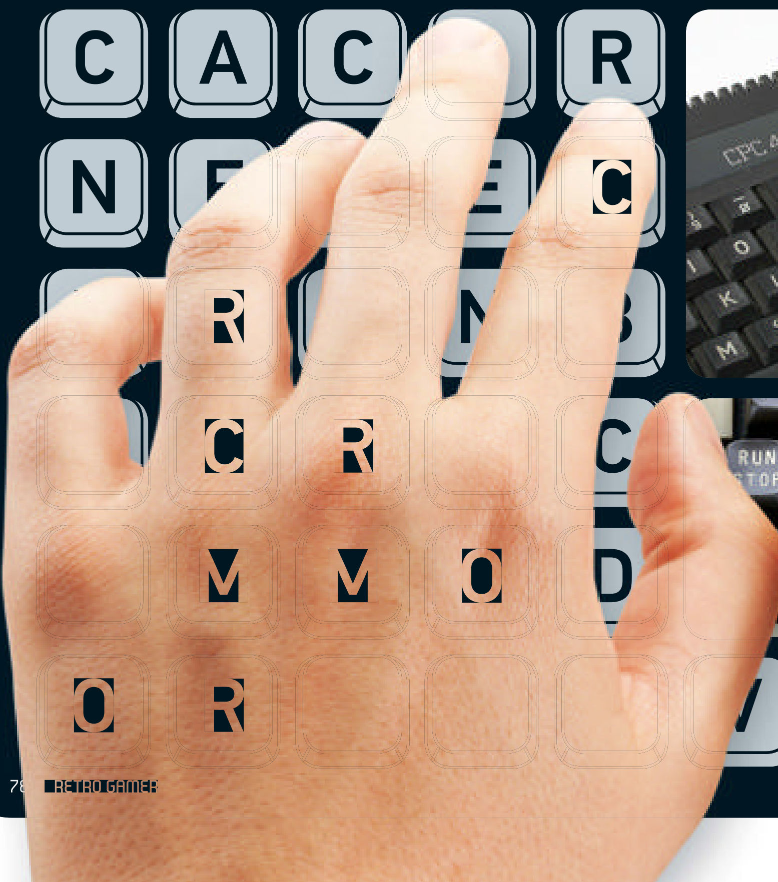










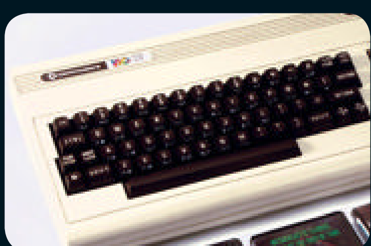


BACK TO BASIC











"They were rubbish and never worked." That's the general consensus when people reflect on type-in games listed in computer books and magazines. Martyn Carroll gets busy with Basic to find out if either criticism is truly warranted

Picture the scene. It's 1983 and you're sprawled in front of your computer, typing in a lengthy game listing. You've been sat there for what feels like 14 hours, carefully copying each Basic instruction from a magazine, or perhaps a book full of listings. You plod slowly down the page, using a ruler to make sure you don't lose your position, until finally the work is complete. It's time to sit back and watch the lines of arcane code come to life.

At this point, it's likely to go horribly wrong in a variety of unpleasant ways. Your computer might suddenly blink off, due to a power cut, or maybe a pesky parent accidentally pulls out the plug to do some impromptu vacuuming. Quite possibly the listing may simply refuse to run and throw up a random error message, either because you made a mistake or there was a mistake in the listing. Such an error might even cause your computer to crash (and naturally, in the excitement of finishing the listing, you neglected to make a back-up).

Most likely though the listing will run fine, but excitement quickly turns to crushing disappointment as you realise that the game doesn't exactly live up to expectations. The Tolkien-style artwork and rousing description accompanying the listings sounded so promising, yet in the game itself the dreaded winged dragon is depicted by the letter 'w' and the orcs are bleedin' asterisks.

GET WITH THE PROGRAM

Despite the pitfalls, game listings were hugely popular in the early Eighties. Just ask Pete Shaw. Pete authored a number of bestselling listings books for the Spectrum, Oric, BBC Micro and other computers. His first title, *Games For Your ZX Spectrum*, was published by Virgin Books in 1983 and featured 23 type-in games. "All of the games in that first book were written from scratch over a period of four or five weeks," he says. "The biggest problem was coming up with ideas. Some were Spectrum versions of existing arcade games, but a lot were the product of conversations with school friends. It became a bit of a collaborative effort."

The success of that book, and subsequent ones, came as a surprise to Pete. "The numbers seemed ridiculous," he says. "There was a real appetite for these books back then, and each one would sell about 80,000, and that was before the international versions. I still find some books popping up on eBay from countries I didn't even know they had been translated for. I wrote about 20 books in total – even I lose count – in the space of about six years."

Pete also contributed type-ins to magazines, and would later work in-house on titles such as *Your Spectrum*, *Your 64* and *QL User*. Game listings quickly became mandatory in most magazines. Some might feature one or two type-ins, or perhaps programming tutorials with example code, while others were launched as dedicated listings mags. The publication that really kick-started the trend – in the UK at least – was the venerable *Computer & Video Games*.

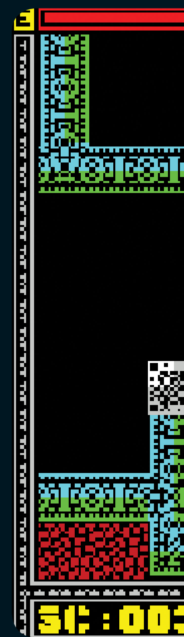
The first issue of *C&VG* arrived in October 1981 and almost a third of it was type-in games. It carried listings for an eclectic mix of computers, including the ZX81, Commodore PET and VIC-20, Atari 400/800, Acorn Atom and even the Nascom 2 kit computer. "Listings were a key feature of the magazine," says launch editor Terry Pratt. "My brief was to be 'the first UK computer entertainment magazine'. I aimed to cover home computers from several angles so we did have programming and hobbyist articles as well as games reviews, including coin-op games."

Readers were invited to send in their own listings in return for cash (a crisp tenner for each one published). Submitted listings couldn't come quick enough, as Terry explains how they acquired content for those early issues. "The publishers had done a deal with a US publisher to use their listings. This was before I came on board as editor and a big chunk of the editorial budget was already spoken for. However, it caused a number of problems. The computers we had listings for

weren't representative of the UK audience and we didn't have those computers in-house so couldn't test the listings. We were choosing blind and the listings often came to us in ways that were hard to reproduce."

C&VG really got the ball rolling, and before long there was an abundance of budding programmers looking to get their listings published. "We probably got about ten to twenty submissions per day," reveals John Cook, who worked on *Popular Computing Weekly*. That many each *day*? Really? "Yes, it was that many. I was never short of material. I was hired as software editor in September 1984 and at the time we had a readership of more than 100,000 per week. Amongst other things I was responsible for all of the listings which comprised eight to ten pages per week. In my time in the post – I left the magazine in 1987 – I must have published about 500 listings. Hopefully most of them worked!"





» [Amstrad CPC] *Galaxian Revenge* from *Amstrad Computer User*, one of the better coin-op clones.

NONSENSE IN BASIC

So then, the issue of type-ins not working. There was always the possibility that the listing itself was bugged and didn't work properly in the first place. If such errors were missed by the author, it's hardly surprising that they'd slip past the publishing team. John did his bit to try and change that at *Popular Computing Weekly*. "Most submissions came with a tape, a print out and a description of what they did," he says. "Amazingly, before my tenure, the listings were just published from the copy sent in and there was not too much testing. To be fair, it was a very small staff at the time, and there was no-one to do the job properly. The first thing I did was invent a rule – no listing would be published unless I could load and run the program and then print it out from the running code. This managed to minimise the problems of non-running, or nonsense listings.

"I spent about two days a week sorting them out, doing quality control and, of course, replying to everyone. We had a very large vocal audience who would ring up and tell me if there were problems, so I was very incentivised to make sure everything was as tight as possible. I also felt I had a duty to anyone who had spent hours typing these things in that it would end up being worthwhile in some way."

Sometimes, even if the type-in worked 100%, there was a fair chance something would go wrong when it came to preparing it for the printed page. "You have to remember this was the stone age of publishing," says John. "My first input device on a computing magazine in 1984 was a portable typewriter. There were no computers in the office other than the target machines. There was a long production process that involved couriers taking raw copy from us to the typesetters, getting galley proofs back, these being / pasted/ onto a grid in a quaint *Blue Peter* kind of way, this going back to the typesetters, getting page proofs back, then sizing artwork to fit, which would be photographed at the setters and dropped into the page, which you'd then proof down at the typesetters on press day. So listings would be cut up, resized and generally fiddled with, and some of this was done remotely by a bloke called Ron. As you can imagine, there was quite a lot of room for error in this process."

> "There was a real appetite for these books back then, and each one would sell about 80,000"
> **Pete Shaw**

"In the early days it was very tricky," agrees Pete. "Some publishers typeset listings rather than reproducing the thermal printer output, and even when they used the original thermal output, the quality of those was such that you could easily mis-read them when typing them in. It was often the art department that caused most headaches. This was back before desktop publishing when artwork was laid out on boards stuck down with hot wax. Sometimes the art department wanted to make something fit, so would cut up a listing and make it nonsensical. Sometimes a line that had been trimmed and moved would simply fall off the board because the wax didn't stick. But these problems weren't too common." When listings might not work because a single character was incorrect, a missing or jumbled line meant almost certain failure.

Bob Wade, who worked on *Personal Computer Games* magazine and later edited *Amstrad Action*, dealt with dozens of type-ins and remembers that there weren't always enough hours in the day to thoroughly verify and evaluate every one. "We never had much time, so we'd give them a quick once-over and make a decision. Most were simple enough anyway that you knew within a very few minutes if they were worth it. Not to put too fine a point on it though, if they worked and did what they said they would, they would probably be in.

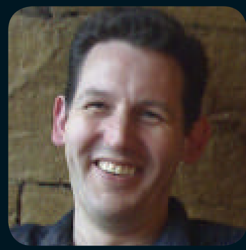
"The process varied on the mags I worked on. Often we'd receive tapes that we'd load up and print out. Sometimes we'd just be sent print-outs and have to type them in ourselves. Just one typo could be disastrous – and often it wasn't obvious what you'd messed up. And that's if they had been right in the first place! If they got through into print, we then had to field all the reader calls about it not working. It was just a nightmare from start to finish. They were always the bane of any magazine staffer's existence. However, they were also space-fillers and, for some reason, readers expected them and sent them in. I think it was more like having your five minutes of fame by having a listing published than anything else."



» [Spectrum] *The Cavern*, published in *PCW*, was the first game from David Leitch, programmer.

BACK TO BASIC





» Bob Wade of *Amstrad Action* fame.



» Usborne published a range of popular programming books. All of the games in this one were designed to run on the ZX81, with changes listed for different computers.

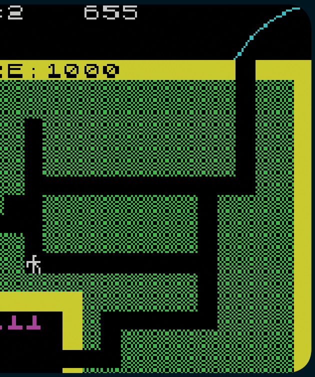




» As a teenager, David Box wrote the *Pixy The Microdot* games for *Your Sinclair.*



» Billed as 'The First Fun Computer Magazine', *Computer & Video Games* triumphantly arrived in 1981.



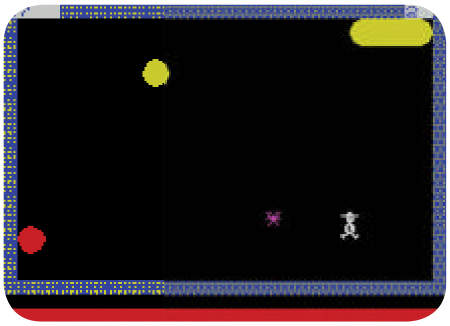
» [Amstrad CPC] *Interceptor,* a novel flight combat game published in *Amstrad Computer User.*



FAMOUS FACES

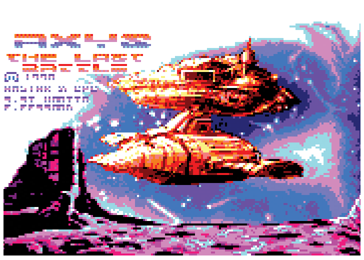
■ It wasn't just eager readers sending in listings to magazines. Sometimes well-known programmers would 'give a bit back' by providing an exclusive type-in. Notable contributors included *The Lords Of Midnight* author Mike Singleton who wrote several games for EMAP titles, his most popular being the strategy title *Treachery. Football Manager* author and famous beard Kevin Toms wrote *European Championship Cup* for *Personal Computer Games,* while Gremlin's Tony Crowther created *Monty Mole* spin-off *Baby Monty* for the same magazine. Jeff Minter and Pete Cooke also shared listings with readers.

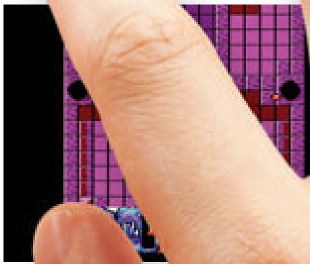
Perhaps most famously, Matthew Smith contributed *Andre's Night Off* to *C&VG.* Billed as a 'missing screen' from *Jet Set Willy,* it was actually a very simple – and rather awful – arcade game in which you had to dodge angry foodstuffs in Miner Willy's kitchen. We wondered how *C&VG* managed to get famous faces like Matt to write type-ins. "Charm," says former editor Terry Pratt, "and the unlikely promise that it would raise their profile."



AXYS OF EVIL

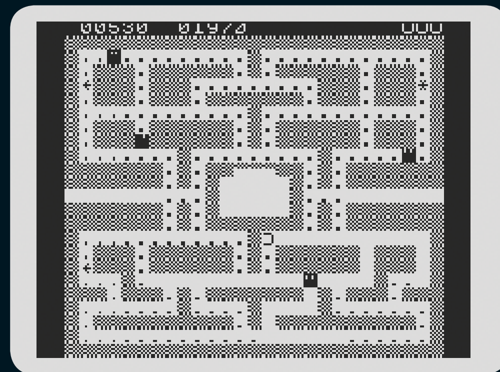
■ In later years some of the published type-ins would swell to gargantuan proportions, consuming many pages and sometimes split over several issues. Taking the trophy for the longest type-in ever has to be *Axys: The Last Battle* for the Amstrad CPC. Appearing in French magazine *CPC Infos* in 1991, the listing was published over four consecutive issues and the resulting game was so big that it required a 128Kb CPC to run. Thankfully, anyone who spent the hours (days?) typing in the required 5,300 data statements was unlikely to be disappointed with the end result. *Axys* was a very good vertical shooter in the *Xenon* mould, with smooth scrolling and colourful, well-drawn graphics. With six levels in total, and a boss at the end of each one, this polished game was essentially a commercial title presented as a type-in.





Listings would be cut up, resized and generally fiddled with. Some of this was done remotely by a bloke called Ron

John Cook



» [ZX81] Your Computer printed the type-in listing to *Pac-81*, a surprisingly slick *Pac-Man* clone.

BASIC INSTINCT

For many who submitted listings, Bob's assertion is probably true. Getting a letter, review or drawing printed in your favourite magazine was impressive, but having one of your type-in games published pretty much guaranteed adulation from your peer group.

Some, like Tim Closs, were spurred on to bigger and better things. Tim had several listings published between 1983 and 1985 before turning professional. He would go on to write a number of titles for Telecomsoft (including the *I, Ball* games) and later turned his attention to console game development. "I was 12 years old and I believe the first listing was in *Your Computer* magazine," he says. "It felt good. I had four or five listings published over a two-year period, covering things like vector graphics and animation, music synthesising, and speech recording and playback. The first listing may have been pure Basic, but the latter ones were definitely a mix of Basic and assembly language, listed as hex dumps."

Tim reveals that he was paid between £50 and £100 per listing, certainly an increase on the £10 offered when *C&VG* first launched. That must have been a decent sum to someone just starting high school, but for Tim there was a bigger, less material benefit. "It certainly helped to build confidence," he reveals. "I remember I was about two-thirds of the way through developing my first full game – *Bomber Bob* for Bug Byte – when I realised I no longer had to design games around the tricks and algorithms I knew, but now had the skills to design tricks and algorithms myself to fulfil whatever design ideas I had. That was definitely a turning point."

Someone else whose first taste of programming success came courtesy of a type-in game was David Box. His Basic listing *Pixy The Microdot* was published in the May 1987 issue of *Your Sinclair*. "It was just sent in on spec", he recalls. "I was 15 when I wrote it and I was still scared of touching assembler. I was just churning out loads of games written in Basic, purely for my own amusement. I mainly sent *Pixy* in because it was small enough to be printable in the magazine – I had a tendency to 'go large'. *Pixy* being a single pixel really came about for practical reasons. I wanted smooth per-pixel movement which wasn't really possible in Spectrum Basic, so I made the character a single dot so I wouldn't need to learn assembler. *Jetpac* was one of my absolute favourite Spectrum games – that mixed with *Thrust* were the main inspirations behind the game mechanics. *Your Sinclair* paid me something like £60. I remember being very chuffed about it, especially as the game only took a weekend to write."

David later joined the Twilight development team and worked on several games published by Ocean Software including *Darkman* and *WWF Wrestlemania*. He has since spent many years at Rockstar Games. "Type-in listings are 100 per cent directly responsible for me learning to program," he says, before revealing that he owes a debt of gratitude to one Spectrum listing in particular that was printed in *Sinclair Programs* magazine. "I remember doing the usual 10 PRINT 'hello' stuff, but programming never truly clicked with me until I typed in a game called *Apple Thief*. It was very simple – a farmer chased you around the screen while you tried to eat apples and avoid him. The code that made the farmer chase you was just a set of tests for the farmer's X and Y position being greater or smaller than yours, and increasing or decreasing his X and Y depending on that. Seeing that little bit of code was enough to shine a brilliant light on it all. It pretty much covers all you need to know on an abstract level. So, thank you type-in listings!"

By the time *Pixy The Microdot* appeared in 1987, type-ins had lost some of their relevance. To keep up with the quality of commercial software, listings had become longer and more complex, often made up of pages and pages of meaningless hex code and data statements. Typing them in was more masochism than hobbyism. The budget market had also taken hold and good value software was plentiful. Why spend hours slaving over a lengthy listing when you could pick up a decent game for just a couple of pounds?

However, the chief factor could be found in the very same issue of *Your Sinclair* that featured *Pixy The Microdot*. Stuck to the front cover was a covertape featuring an unreleased Ocean game. *Your Sinclair* wasn't the first magazine to trial covertapes, but it was the first to make them a regular fixture. Within months, many of the magazines began to run their own covertapes, featuring a mix of full games, demos and utilities. There was little point in readers typing in listings when software could be provided on tape (or disk), ready and waiting to be loaded up.

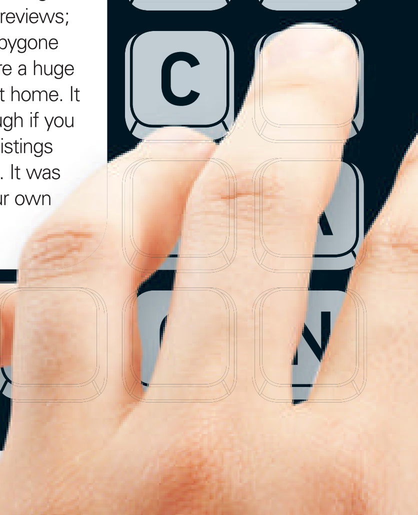
"It was the increasing use of the covermounted tapes, which eventually became the norm rather than special," comments Pete Shaw on the decline of the type-in listing. "This meant that we no longer needed to publish the actual listing itself and when that happened it wasn't long before Basic listings disappeared altogether in favour of full copies of games. Market demand, I guess."

Indeed, David Box's improved *Pixy The Microdot* sequel appeared on a *Your Sinclair* covertape rather than as a listing inside the mag. Although that wasn't the initial plan. "I actually made a simpler version of *Pixy 2* as a type-in game," he says. "It was about 2Kb or so of assembler, had 64 screens and magnets just like the covertape version, and had to be typed in as hex codes. I sent it in but by that time listings had disappeared and were ultimately replaced by the covertapes. After that I finally got down to writing an all-assembler game, which became *Pixy 2*, and sent in into *Your Sinclair*."



OUT OF MEMORY

Type-in listings had run their course by the end of the Eighties. Some of the remaining 8-bit magazines carried a few programming pages, but they seemed oddly out of place among the usual mix of news, previews and reviews; almost like an antiquated joke from a bygone era. Yet for many readers, listings were a huge part of growing up with a computer at home. It wasn't just about 'free' games (although if you owned a sadly neglected micro then listings proved to be vital source of software). It was more about being able to develop your own programming skills by studying – and

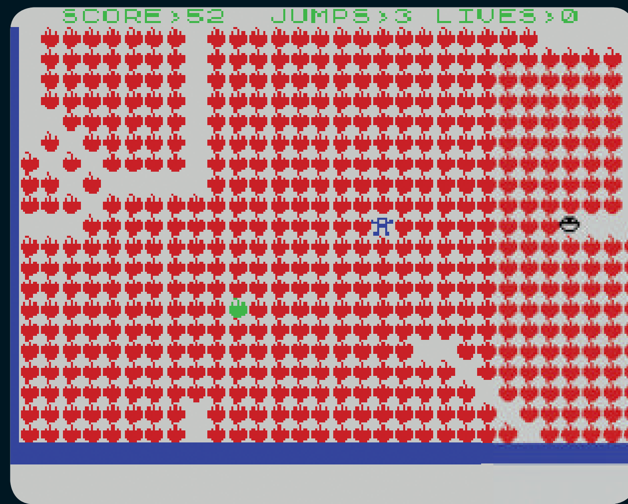


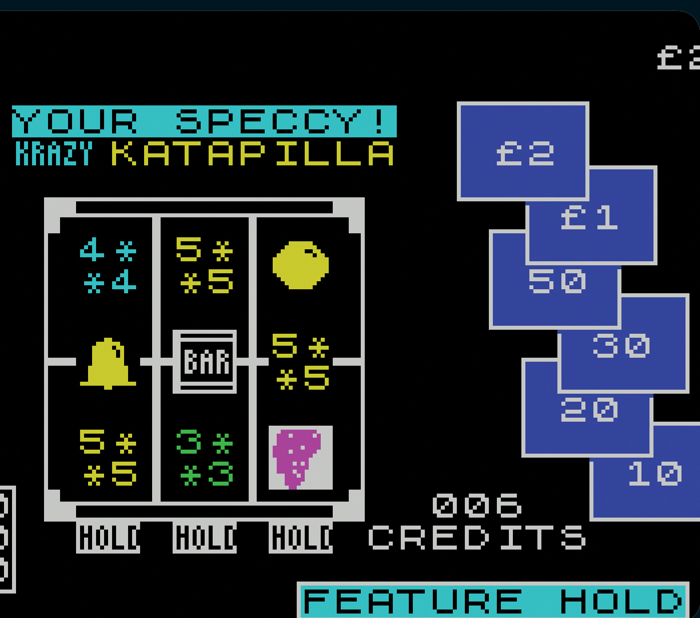


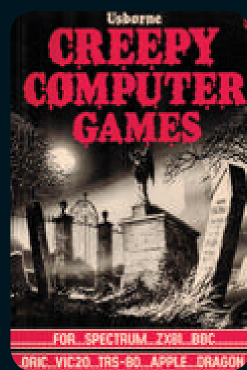
» John Cook of *Popular Computing Weekly*. He would later go on to edit *Dragon User* magazine.

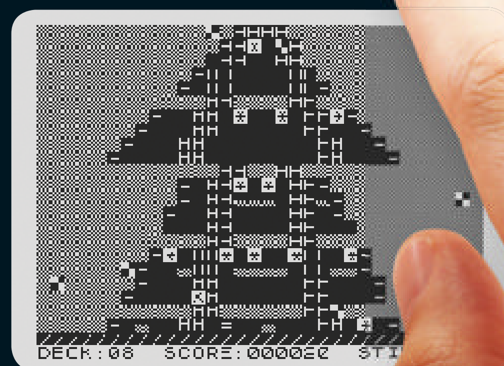


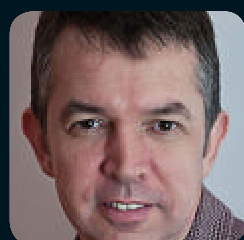
» If you wanted wall-to-wall listings then *Sinclair Programs* was your kind of magazine.









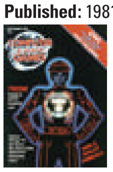


» Pete Shaw, author of many programming books and later deputy editor of *Your Spectrum/Sinclair*.

THE TOP TYPE-IN MAGAZINES

Computer & Video Games

Publisher: EMAP/Dennis/Future
Published: 1981-2004



■ Generally regarded as the world's first videogame magazine, *C&VG* enjoyed several golden periods during its long-running history. In the early days when listings were its bread and butter, the 1983-1985 period was particularly rich. Type-in games for all of the popular computers were carried, along with the usual news and reviews, and of course Keith Campbell's cracking adventure section.

Your Computer

Publisher: IPC
Published: 1981-1988



■ For the typical micro owner, *Your Computer* was an excellent all-rounder, which covered a real mix of content surrounding videogames, programming and hardware. Listings were an important part of the mix, and it deserves special mention due to the number of excellent type-in games that appeared in its pages. In particular, ZX81, Spectrum and Commodore 64 owners were rewarded with many top quality games over the years.

Popular Computing Weekly

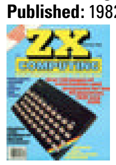
Publisher: Sunshine/Focus
Published: 1982-1990



■ If money was tight and you couldn't afford one of the monthly magazines, 30 pence would buy you a copy of this respected weekly. Each issue carried several type-in listings which you could have a bash at once you'd consumed the latest computer news and game reviews. The coverage was admirably wide, with support for many machines including some of the lesser known 8-bit underdogs.

ZX Computing

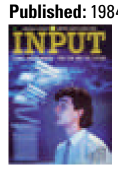
Publisher: Argus
Published: 1982-1987



■ Certainly not one of the most popular or best-selling Sinclair magazines, *ZX Computing* was nonetheless a valuable resource for keen programmers. Initially published bi-monthly, it featured game listings aplenty for the ZX80/81 and Spectrum. And if machine code didn't click after you'd followed Toni Baker's eight-part tutorial than ran from issue three onwards, then it probably never would, and it was time to move onto a different hobby.

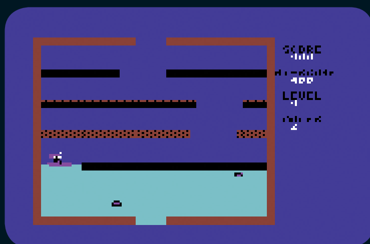
Input

Publisher: Marshall Cavendish
Published: 1984-1985



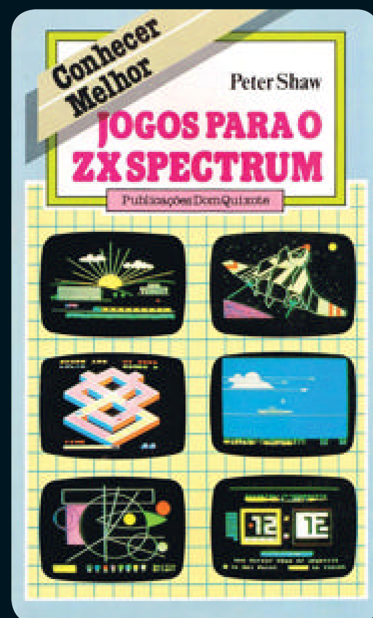
■ Most people remember this part-work as it was advertised extensively on television when it was launched. Comprising 52 weekly issues, Input build up into a comprehensive programming course. Basic and other languages were covered, and there were regular sections on machine code and games programming. The main machines that *Input* supported were the Spectrum, C64, BBC/Electron and Dragon 32.







» [Commodore 64] The *Monty Mole* game you've probably never played. *Baby Monty* was written by Tony Crowther for *PCG*.



» Pete's *Games For Your ZX Spectrum* book was translated into several different languages.

> **"I know many people who submitted games who went on to become games programmers"** Terry Pratt

perhaps fixing, or even improving – the work of others. The mechanics of a shoot-'em-up, strategy game or text adventure were laid out in front of you.

In the early days there were lots of simple coin-op clones, but just like commercial software, the quality dramatically improved over time. Whether it was a succinct listing that produced a great little game, or a mammoth multi-part effort that resulted in a commercial-quality title, there were plenty of gems to be discovered and every genre of gaming was covered. And over time you could learn to determine which might be the most interesting or potentially decent program by simply scanning the code.

As for the notion that listings never worked, it's perhaps a case of putting things into perspective. When you consider how many thousands of type-ins were published, in all of the various magazines and books, the number of non-working listings is relatively small. By way of example, Jim Grimwood of *The Type Fantastic*, an archive of type-ins taken from Sinclair magazines, reveals that of the 4,639 listings on file (as of November 2012), the number that cannot be completed due to printing errors is just 28. A tiny percentage, although admittedly this does not include listings that were initially broken but were later fixed (many magazines would print corrections in subsequent issues, or sometimes offer tried and tested versions on tape). Naturally, it's the non-working listings that stick in the mind, particularly if you wasted hours tapping away.

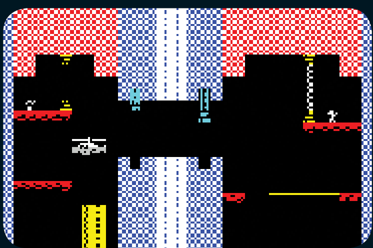
For the 8-bit computer owner interested in learning how to program, the benefits of type-in games definitely outweighed the negatives. "For the readers there definitely was a benefit to type-in listings," says Pete Shaw. "I've had a number of comments from people who told me they learnt to program using my books, like a process of osmosis got them familiar with the code simply because they had to bash all those commands in and then check through them for typing errors when it ultimately didn't run! There was a boom period for authors and publishers and I very much enjoyed that journey. It was an amazing opportunity as a teenager and taught me skills that I still use."

John Cook is of a similar mind. "I think they were very, very useful at the time. Listings were the open source of the day, the only way you could easily see how 'the experts' wrote their stuff. My proudest listing was getting Jeff Minter to let me print some of the primitive routines for *Colourspace*. That was a characteristically generous gesture from him."

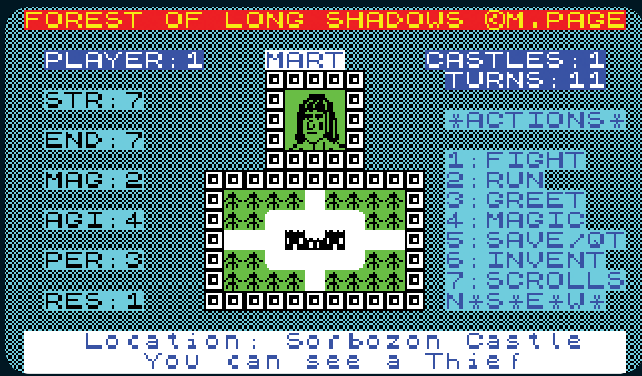
Terry Pratt's views are more mixed, mainly due to the headaches they caused in-house. "They were the bane of our lives in terms of being able to faithfully reproduce them, answering calls from readers who had problems with the listings, testing them when we could and selecting winners from losers. And we had a tiny staff in the early days. But, even when listings went wrong, budding programmers learnt from them. Even I learnt to program sufficiently to come up with a handful of Basic games for different computers. At the time of *C&VG*'s launch the games market was very young, good games were thin on the ground, new computers constantly launched with little or no games available and there was still a strong hobbyist element to the readership. I know many people who submitted games who went on to become games programmers."

Bob Wade, meanwhile, is forever scarred by REM statements and FOR NEXT loops. "Were they a good thing? If I'm honest, no. They were hardly ever worth the huge amount of effort that went into them. But I can't help but think of them fondly, because as much trouble as they were, they were also responsible for creating a whole generation of coders that, at one time, made Britain the centre of the computer games world. So in one way the listings were worth it for what they encouraged people to go on and do.

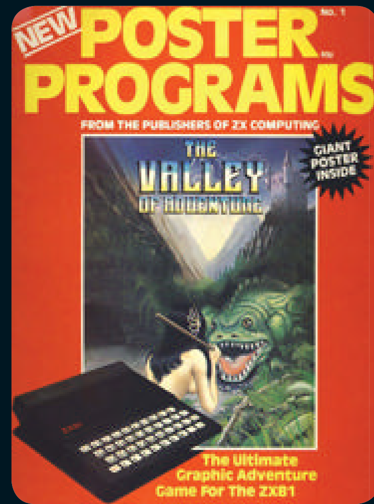
"But please, please, please don't ever ask me to type in one of those things again!"



» [Spectrum] *Chopper Mission* was originally published as a machine code listing in *Your Sinclair* and was later included on one of the magazine's DigiTape compilations.



» [Spectrum] *Forest Of Long Shadows* was a decent RPG offering from Martin Page.





RECOMMENDED TYPE-IN GAMES



Scram-81

Format: ZX81
Published: 1983 (in *Your Computer*)

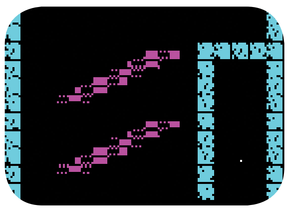
This *Scramble* clone for the ZX81 mixes Basic and machine code to excellent effect. Most of the original's gameplay features are present and it plays surprisingly well. It's certainly up there with the machine's best commercial releases. The author (Philip Harwood) also produced a rather fantastic ZX81 version of *Pac-Man*, *Pac-81*.



Rocket Man Mike

Format: Spectrum
Published: 1985 (in *Your Computer*)

Spectrum owners might recognise this colourful platformer, as the non-stop action is really rather similar to *Mutant Monty*, Karl Jeffery's earlier commercial hit for Artic Computing. The game was also ripped off by the infamous Harry S. Price on at least two occasions. Well, they do say that imitation is the greatest form of flattery.



Pixy The Microdot

Format: Spectrum
Published: 1987 (in *Your Sinclair*)

Apart from undoubtedly holding the world record for the smallest game character ever, *Pixy The Microdot* is probably the best type-in game to feature in *Your Spectrum* magazine (one of the magazines in which you were rather spoiled for choice). There's a maze to explore, nasties to avoid and some highly suspect gravity to contend with. Excellent stuff.



Goblin Mountain

Format: Spectrum
Published: 1987 (in *Sinclair User*)

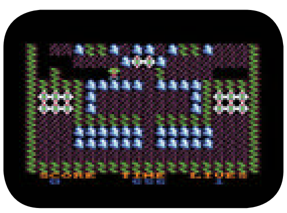
Martin Page's fantastic follow-up to his earlier type-in *Forest Of Long Shadows* is a must for fans of *D&D*-style games. There are four separate quests and everything is randomised, from the characters' stats to the layout of the mountain, so there's always a fresh challenge every time you play. A great game to play around with and modify.



Treachery

Formats: Spectrum/C64/BBC Micro
Published: 1984 (in *C&VG*)

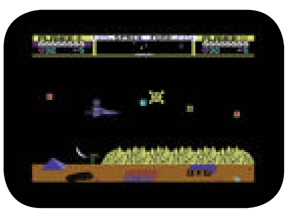
This secret service strategy game from Mike Singleton was like a mini-event, coming complete with a playing board, cut-out counters and a keyboard overlay. The original Spectrum listing was so popular that *C&VG* also commissioned Commodore 64 and BBC Micro conversions for inclusion in its special 1985 Yearbook.



Diamond Digger

Format: Amstrad CPC
Published: 1986 (in *Computing With The Amstrad*)

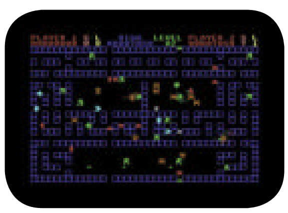
This appears to be another *Boulder Dash* clone, but there's a neat twist. The screen doesn't scroll, but you can manipulate your position and the location of diamonds and boulders by shifting the rows left and right. This mechanic turns it into a frantic puzzle game where you must plan each move against the clock.



Space Junk

Format: Commodore 64
Published: 1985 (in *Your Computer*)

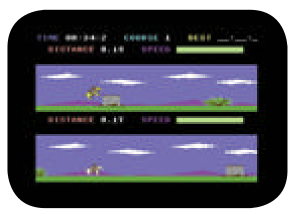
Nalin Sharma's side-scrolling shooter for the C64 that could have easily sold as a commercial title. Fast-paced, with great graphics and featuring a clever scrolling effect, it was worth every minute of time it took to enter. Nalin was another programmer that would go on to enjoy a career in the games industry, and is still involved with it today.



Crossroads

Format: Commodore 64
Published: 1987 (in *COMPUTE!'s Gazette*)

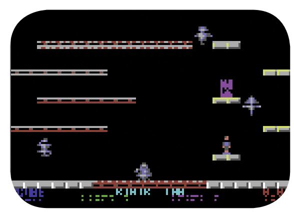
Appearing across the pond in *COMPUTE!*'s Commodore bible, this frankly brilliant maze shooter swamps the screen with frantic action. It's like *Robotron* hits *Pac-Man*. Best of all, it supports two-player simultaneous play so you can battle the monsters alongside a mate. An enhanced sequel, suitably subtitled *Pandemonium*, followed.



Steeplechase

Format: Commodore 64
Published: 1987 (in *Ahoy!*)

Another classy listing to appear in a US-based magazine. This two-player race game is best described as *Kikstart* with steeds replacing scramblers. A randomly generated cross-country course adds to the fun. Author Tony Brantner produced dozens of decent type-in games over the years, but this stands out as his finest effort.



RG Rampage

Format: Commodore 64
Published: 2012 (in **Retro Gamer**)

Okay, indulge us with this one! Included as part of this magazine's issue 100 celebration, **RG**'s very own Jason Kelk created this splendid platformer in which you take control of frazzled editor Darran as he dashes frantically around the office, gathering up wandering stray pages on deadline day. A great game and a lovely link to the past.

THE MAKING OF

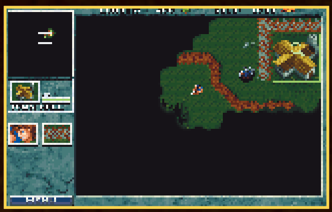
WARCRAFT: ORCS & HUMANS

Join Graeme Mason as he talks to former Blizzard designer and coder Patrick Wyatt and discovers the game that helped influence the entire real-time strategy genre, as well as inspire the most successful MMORPG of all time. Beware, the humans draw near…

Mention the name *Warcraft* today and most people will immediately think of *World Of Warcraft*, the incredibly successful MMORPG that has dominated the genre since 2004. Yet the story of *Warcraft* began over ten years earlier with an embryonic company named Silicon and Synapse, who would soon transform into the more commonly-known Blizzard Entertainment. The company's founders were Allen Adham and Michael Morhaime. "I knew Mike from an engineering fraternity at UCLA," begins Patrick, "and he invited me down to offer me a contract role converting the DOS/Amiga game *Battle Chess* to Windows 3." Patrick worked on this conversion from February until June 1991 before graduating from university and beginning full-time employment at Silicon and Synapse later that year.

Patrick was soon busy on various SNES projects such as *The Lost Vikings* and *Rock 'n' Roll Racing*. However, despite good critical reception, they weren't big sellers, resulting in a focus on PC products. "One day in September 1993, Allen came up to me and told me to take over a new project called *Warcraft* as producer and programming lead," recalls Patrick and there was little doubt of the main source of inspiration for the game. Many of the Silicon team had become addicted to the iconic Westwood game, *Dune 2*, discussing almost every day the various tactics and styles that could be used. "It wasn't so much a gap in the market, as an opportunity," he smiles, "as it was obvious to us that *Dune 2*, despite our fondness for it, had weaknesses. We thought we could create something special if we improved upon the design." The first major change was the setting – "We all loved fantasy and Tolkien was a major inspiration" – and Patrick also confirms that a *Warhammer* licence was considered. "It was certainly discussed. Allen was keen on it







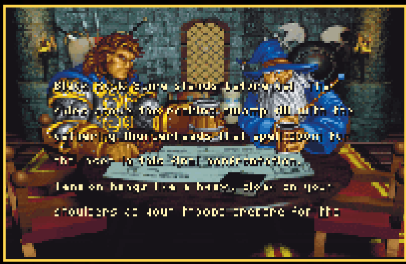
» [PC] A commander's first task was usually training up the peasants to do the dirty work.

BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** INTERPLAY
» **DEVELOPER:** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT
» **RELEASED:** 1994
» **PLATFORM:** PC, MAC
» **GENRE:** REAL-TIME STRATEGY





» [PC] Planning the Orcs' demise.

to try and increase sales and gain brand recognition but as far as I was concerned, I was pleased when nothing came of it. We wanted to create and control our own universe, although *Warhammer* became a big influence in the art style of *Warcraft*."

Patrick and the team began to tweak the design of *Warcraft* with changes borne of their extensive play-testing of *Dune 2*. In came two-player LAN and Modem play, multiple-unit selection and upgradeable resources. As a result, one of *Dune 2*'s most controversial elements that ultimately remained in *Warcraft* was the controlled town expansion – construction could only take place next to roads laid by the player – which was chiefly implemented to avoid the player constructing "stealth" towns next to an opponent's base. "I think in retrospect that was a bad decision. We argued about it a lot at the time and it stayed in; but it was one of the first things we eliminated when it came to *Warcraft 2*."

Your will, sire?

"The process of creating *Warcraft* was very organic," continues Patrick, "and to start off with was mostly me writing code as fast as I could for several months." When the game began to form, Blizzard brought in Ron Millar to head up the design, a small team of programmers to assist Patrick with coding and graphics and the storyline was devised. However, a divergence in the direction of the gameplay was soon appearing; *Warcraft* was turning into something quite different from the series we know and love today.

"Initially Ron led the design away from *Dune 2* and towards games such as *Populous*. For example, peasants weren't going to be "built", but would instead pop out of farms after a while. It didn't feel right to many of us," says Patrick. This type of unit creation limited the player's control; each peasant could be converted into another unit, yet there was no direct influence over quantity or timing. The gameplay was planned but never implemented and this was mainly down to graphics artist and designer Stu Rose, as Patrick explains. "While Allen and Ron were off at CES in Chicago, Stu made some proposals about how the game should work, essentially making it simpler to play and closer to *Dune 2* again." The remaining team discussed the ideas and agreed they would make for a much better playing experience. Patrick implemented the changes as quickly as possible to present to Adham and Millar on their return. When they saw what had become of *Warcraft*, they reluctantly agreed the alterations were for the best – much to the team's relief.

Stop poking meeee!

Patrick confirms one of *Warcraft*'s principal design tenets: simplicity. "Many games were just too hard to play because they required detailed interaction with the user interface," he explains, "so our goal was always to create a game where the interface just got out of the way of the gameplay." One of the elements the team quickly learned during development was ▶



» [PC] Catapults were a very destructive weapon if utilised carefully.

> It was obvious to us that Dune 2, despite our fondness for it, had weaknesses — PATRICK WYATT



» [PC] Some scenarios, such as this underground rescue mission, varied the gameplay.



» [PC] A useful statistical summation page concluded each successful mission.



STU ROSE ON DESIGNING WARCRAFT

"I had just finished the animation, artwork and user interface for a SNES game called *Blackthorne* when I was called onto *Warcraft*," recalls former Blizzard artist Stu Rose, "and was handed the task of creating the basic outline of what buildings there should be and the underlying design for the game." Eventually Stu took Ron Millar's scenario designs and constructed a map that fit logically according to position and placement. "At the same time I was hounding Mike [Morhaime] to hire a friend of mine – Bill Roper," he continues. Together with Glenn Stafford, Bill used his background in music and singing to create the distinctive *Warcraft* voice and music. "Recording was all done in Glenn's office during the quieter times of the day. It was great fun saying "Yesh, my lord!" into a microphone so many times that the words started to lose their meaning!"

THE MAKING OF



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ROCK N' ROLL RACING
SYSTEM: SNES, MEGA DRIVE, GBA
YEAR: 1993

BLACKTHORNE
SYSTEM: SNES, 32X, PC, GBA, MAC
YEAR: 1994

DIABLO III (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC, MAC
YEAR: 2012



the use of hot-keys; it was evident that in a real-time battle, players needed to give actions to their units commands quickly and easily, given the unit control limit.

It seems odd looking back today that you can only select up to four units at once in *Warcraft*, yet this method sidesteps one of the criticisms of Westwood's *Command And Conquer* series where no such restriction existed. "Allen Adham was the chief proponent of the four-unit selection limit," reveals Patrick, "and whilst we didn't all see eye to eye on it, we realised it had merits." The limit served several purposes, most importantly making the game more tactical by eliminating "tank-rush" tactics and forcing the player to concentrate more on the meat and bones of the game: combat. "If you had played *Warcraft* back in 1993, you'd have been able to drag-select as many units as you like," discloses Patrick, "and although it was a really useful way to determine my path-finding and unit formation code – select fifty units and tell them all to go to the other side of the map and watch the unfolding chaos of a traffic jam – I thought the limit was the correct decision at the time." Whilst Patrick's subsequent code tinkering and the four-unit selection solved the traffic jam issues, he concedes in retrospect that perhaps four units was too low; the limit was raised to nine for *Warcraft 2*.

> The game was so close to shipping without multiplayer but we got it in the end and shipped just two weeks late
>
> PATRICK WYATT

Lok'tar

It wasn't just the design that caused the development of *Warcraft* to stumble; there were several technical issues too. "We were very keen on multiplayer play and our biggest challenge was debugging the multiplayer sync errors," frowns Patrick. These bugs occurred when the data between each game did not correspond correctly, usually resulting in the game crashing. "The very first multiplayer game was between myself and fellow coder Bob Fitch. It was a bittersweet moment: playing that first game was the most brilliant experience, because it was the game I was writing and I knew there was another tactically adept player controlling the other side." Unfortunately Patrick's joy was short-lived; a "desync" soon struck followed by an abrupt crash leading them to realise that creating a smooth multiplayer *Warcraft* experience was going to be much tougher than they had originally envisioned.

"We discovered many sync bugs, and at one point it was so bad that Allen said we had to drop multiplayer, release a single player game and then add the multiplayer later." Still passionate about its inclusion, the team fought for it to be re-instated and Patrick still firmly believes that if multiplayer had been dropped from the original *Warcraft*, Blizzard would not be the company it is today. "There was a period of several months where I tracked one specific bug. The game was so close to shipping


» [PC] The suitably foreboding entrance to the Orc stronghold of Black Rock.





» [PC] Each race had equivalent types of building.

without multiplayer but we got it in the end and shipped just two weeks late." he remembers. Other issues were slowly ironed out and relatively minor compared to the dreaded sync bugs.

By this stage, *Warcraft* already boasted its distinctive bright and cheerful graphics that belied the frequent bloody battles. "There were lots of companies that were going for the gritty look in their games, but I think our artists' experience with making characters "read well" for the early console games we developed really had a big impact here. Sam Didier led the art and had a style that was so engaging, everyone who saw it loved it," explains Patrick. Blizzard's artists worked under a policy that all artwork had to be drawn under fluorescent lights rather than dark rooms, with the theory being that as it was the worst possible light, the artwork would look better in any other light.

Consequently, *Warcraft*'s artwork and graphics had to be bright and colourful to stand out against these harsh conditions and the game's humour went hand-in-hand with this style says Patrick. "We tried to use humour effectively in all our games, because it's another aspect of entertainment. We felt too many games took themselves too seriously whilst we just wanted to entertain people."

Heh heh heh...

Towards the end of the development of *Warcraft*, an important member was added to the team. Bill Roper joined ostensibly to back-fill the Orcs versus humans storyline and ultimately lent his charismatic talents to one of the most memorable features of the game. "Along with guys who laid down the foundation with the artwork, Bill did a fantastic job creating the voice-tracks to *Warcraft*," says Patrick proudly, "and the many humorous one-liners that gave the game its personality." With Bill also helping to design the game's manual, *Warcraft* was beginning to take shape very nicely with Patrick and the team still seemingly unaware of a notable rival that was also being developed at the same time. "It wasn't until we met up with the Westwood folks at trade shows after the release of *Warcraft* that we began to learn what it'd been up to with its follow up to *Dune 2 – Command And Conquer*. My impression was they weren't exactly happy over it; but I reckoned they should have been pleased that we'd taken their great game as a base for ours."

Work Complete

On release, *Warcraft* was a big success and a sleeper hit. Did this surprise Blizzard? "Well, yes and no," says Patrick, "We knew it would be successful because, hell, it was addictive! When we shipped the gold master discs, everyone just kept playing the game and no-one would go home! But our idea of success was selling 200k units, so I guess we were surprised, as although the game didn't take off straight away, it was a consistent seller; word of mouth meant we sold 400,000 units in around a year – which we thought was awesome."

We conclude by asking Patrick how he sees *Warcraft*'s significance today. "Blizzard is the company it is today because of the things we did all the way back in 1992. We made mistakes, but learned from them. We argued a lot internally, but came up with the best solutions to hard problems. And from those beginnings we built a company where we knew all the right answers, answers that were right for the players which led to the vast popularity of our games in later years. And *Warcraft* was there, practically from the start."

Our thanks to Patrick Wyatt and Stu Rose.

THE WORLDS OF WARCRAFT

WARCRAFT: ORCS & HUMANS (1994)



Inspired by *Dune 2*, this is where it really began for Blizzard. When Orcish Warlocks discover a rift between their world and the Kingdom of Azeroth, they soon begin transporting warriors to plunder the human lands. Using the resources of the land (timber and gold), it is the player's duty to fend off attackers and destroy the enemy.

WARCRAFT 2: TIDES OF DARKNESS (1995)



For *Warcraft's* much-anticipated sequel, the Blizzard team set about ironing out all the self-admitted flaws from the first game including, most significantly, increasing the number of units the player could select, the addition of hero characters and a re-forming fog of war. Multiplayer was also improved as well, with up to eight players online.

WARCRAFT 2: BEYOND THE DARK PORTAL (1996)



The hero units from *Warcraft 2* were enhanced for this expansion with specific portraits and speech as well as abilities. Also included were two brand new campaigns and a host of additional multiplayer maps. The plot follows on from the main game as the humans attempt to seal the rift between Azeroth and the Orc's homeland, Draenor.

WARCRAFT 3: REIGN OF CHAOS (2002)



Also known as the forgotten *Warcraft* game. This second sequel had the misfortune to be released just before the phenomenon of *World Of Warcraft*, and as a result got a fraction of the publicity. Which is a shame, as it introduced two more playable races (Night Elves and the Insidious Undead), experienced units, and a map editor.

WARCRAFT 3: THE FROZEN THRONE (2003)



The official expansion for *Warcraft 3* added a new realm (Northrend), four new campaigns, a host of new characters to control and – making a welcome return from *Warcraft 2* – naval units. Mix in neutral heroes and two more auxiliary races (controllable, but they don't have their own campaign) and you had an expansion that was excellent value.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT (2004)



Without doubt the most successful MMORPG of all time, *WoW* continues to prove popular today, almost ten years after its original release. *WoW*'s key attribute is a simplicity that allows casual players to become slowly drawn into the complex *Warcraft* world, and at its peak in 2008 the game enjoyed a reported 12 million subscribers.

DESERT • ISLAND • DISKS

Shahid Ahmad

What cherished games would you take to the island?

From the Spectrum to Sony, Shahid Ahmad has spent the last thirty years in the games business. He tells Paul Drury about his isometric adventures, joining the Jet Set and little robot love

"I wondered if it was because of my name," muses Shahid Ahmad, recalling the rejection letters he received from Software Houses back in the early Eighties. "I thought, 'Is it a racism thing?' You have to remember at that time the National Front was big, I'd experienced a lot of racism at school, racist mobs had smashed down our door at home and it was rife in the workplace. So I started submitting my games under a pseudonym – James Kent!"

Adopting such a quintessentially English moniker was a sadly understandable response from a London boy who had grown up in those dark days of racist graffiti, playground taunts and worse. The young Shahid was an aspiring coder even at school, having begged his mother to buy him an Atari 400 when he was fifteen. The £400 price tag was a major outgoing for a single parent family living in a council house and was an early example of his canny ability to strike a deal. "I promised I'd make my mum a scrolling map of London, so she'd never get lost again," he explains, with a grin.

Unfortunately for Mrs Ahmad, instead of recreating those city streets on screen, Shahid set to work on making his own shoot-'em-up. He produced *Alien Attack* for the Atari 400 and proudly advertised it in the pages of *Popular Computing Weekly*. He sold no copies. Undeterred, he wrote *Raining Cats And Dogs* and *Cumulous* in 1982 and '83 respectively and sent them off to numerous publishing companies. All Shahid received back were rejection letters. Does he believe that racist attitudes could indeed have been behind this negativity to his work?

"Oh no, it was just because those early games were crap!" he laughs. "When I did get *Storm In A Teacup* accepted by Artic, I went to see Chris Thornton [head of Artic Software]. I said, 'Surprise! Bet you didn't expect to see a brown face!' He just shrugged and said, 'Not really, your credit screen is full of Asian names.' Racism was never an issue at all."

With the proceeds from his first published title, Shahid bought a Spectrum and produced *My Word* for Papillon, a company set up by a couple of chaps who ran a tape hire business in London's West End. They lent him a Commodore 64 and he produced a version of this little word puzzler for that machine, too. We wonder which side he took in the great Speccy versus C64 micro wars? "I loved them both," he assures us. "Both had their charm. I loved the Z80 instruction set and picked it up very quickly but then I was 6502 born and bred! I just loved computers and technology. I had a real techno lust and an insatiable hunger to program. Mind you, you wouldn't catch me anywhere near a Dragon…"

Shahid's intimate knowledge of both machines helped him land his first really big coding gig. He followed up *My Word* with the considerably more ambitious arcade adventure *Faces Of Haarne* and started contacting larger publishing houses. Having flunked his A-levels due to games programing and countless hours playing *Jet Set Willy* and *Sabre Wulf*, he was delighted when Software Projects invited him up to their Liverpool offices with a view to signing his new game. He was shown around by Alan Maton, one of the directors of the company, who introduced Shahid to the man behind the *Miner Willy* games.

"I did meet Matthew Smith," he recalls. "Well, I say met. He was curled up in a sleeping bag underneath his Tandy in an office. I'd been telling Alan how *Jet Set Willy* had possessed me and he said they had a bit of a problem. The current programmer doing the C64 conversion of the game had taken six months to do not that much and they weren't confident he could finish it. He said to me, 'Do you think you could do it in a month?' I said yes. It wasn't until I was on the train home that I suddenly realised, 'What the fuck have I done?' I was crapping myself with fear."

Armed with the Z80 listing of the game, Shahid returned to London and turned his fear into fervour. He delivered the C64 version within the impossibly tight deadline, though he maintains that with another few weeks of development time, he could have eradicated the bugs that sadly blighted the

Trivia

Shahid received £10,000 for writing *The Comet Game* for the C64 and Atari 800, a figure he describes today as "disgusting, as it's one of the worst games of all time."



Shahid in 1985, practising his bass while the Spectrum compiles his code.



> “Coding is totally embedded in me, almost to a spiritual degree. I got bitten by the bug very young”

Once bitten, forever smitten

FIRST JOB
Handing out leaflets at Marble Arch

CURRENT JOB
Senior business development manager at Sony Computer Entertainment Europe

FAVOURITE FILM
American Beauty

FAVOURITE ALBUM
Brilliant Trees by David Sylvian

FIRST COMPUTER/CONSOLE
PS Vita

FAVOURITE COMPUTER/CONSOLE
PC

BEST GAMING ACHIEVEMENT
My high score on Super Crate Box: 306

BESTSELLING PRODUCT
Jet Set Willy (C64)

BEST HOLIDAY
Grenada to see the Alhambra

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH
Has to be my wife and kids.



145235-46746546546546

SEX
M

NAME
Shahid Ahmad

DATE OF BIRTH
21 DEC 1965

PLACE OF BIRTH
London

BIOGRAPHY
Starting out on the Atari 400, Shahid produced a string of original games and conversions for all the popular 8-bit micros of the eighties. He went on to produce game music for 16-bit computers and consoles and currently works for Sony.

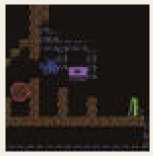
Timeline

1983 · 1984 · 1985 · 1986

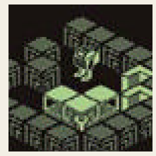
MY WORD
■ **YEAR:** 1983
■ **FORMAT:** Spectrum/C64
Shahid proved his ability to code on multiple platforms by producing this word game on both the Spectrum and C64. He assures us he loves both.



JET SET WILLY
■ **YEAR:** 1984
■ **FORMAT:** C64
Given just a month to convert Matthew Smith's masterpiece, Shahid did a surprisingly good job, though like the original, bugs were a major issue.



CHIMERA
■ **YEAR:** 1985
■ **FORMAT:** C64/Spectrum/Amstrad/Atari 800
Taking inspiration from *Knight Lore*, Shahid handled all the 8-bit versions of this charming isometric adventure.

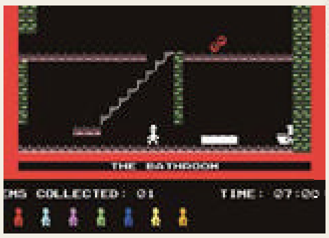


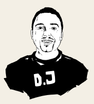
NIGHTSHADE
■ **YEAR:** 1986
■ **FORMAT:** Coin-op
A huge fan of Ultimate's oeuvre, handling the C64 port of this scrolling adventure was a dream job for Shahid.



The Team On Ahmad

Here's what **Retro Gamer** has to say about Shahid Ahmad's games…



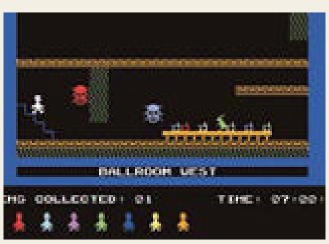


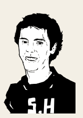
Darran Jones
I love it when an article in **Retro Gamer** opens my eyes. I always assumed that *Jet Set Willy* on the Commodore 64 had been coded by its creator Matthew Smith, so I've found Shahid's involvement very interesting. I've never heard of *Chimera* before either, but that's something I'll certainly be checking out now, it looks rather good.



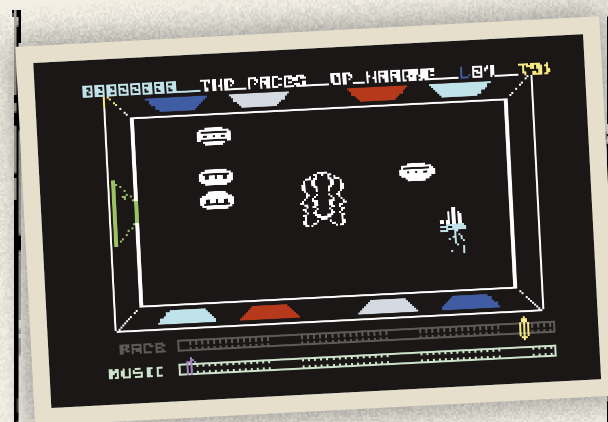


Paul Drury
It's hard to think of a more prolific programmer than Shahid back in the 8-bit era. His ability to code across so many different platforms and to mix solid conversion work like *Nightshade* with such ambitious original titles as *Pandora* is hugely impressive. He's lost none of his passion for gaming, either… and he can lay down a funky bassline, too.





Stuart Hunt
Like Darran I'm not really clued up on Shahid's work, as I grew up owning an Amstrad CPC. I certainly remember playing *Jet Set Willy* on my friend's C64 though, and I've obviously played *Nightshade* (well the Amstrad and Spectrum versions at least). I also remember the excellent music from Floor 13 being rather special as well.

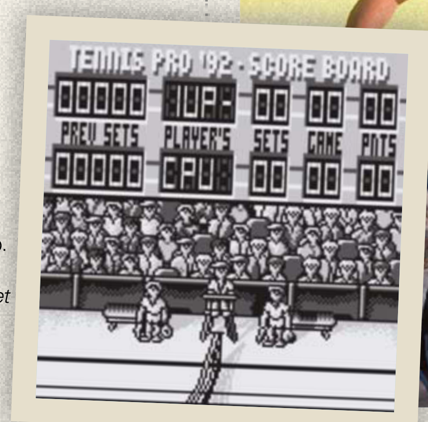


» [C64] *The Faces Of Haarne* (C64) was the game that got Shahid into Software Projects.

final game (see boxout 'Where's Willy?') With money in the bank and his coding skills constantly improving, Shahid began work on an original title, *Chimera*, a homage to the pioneering isometric work of *Ultimate Play The Game*. "You're so polite," interrupts Shahid. "It was an utter rip off of *Knight Lore*. When that came out, my jaw, and the jaws of thousands of Spectrum owners, just dropped. 'Hold on, that's 3D! What the hell have they made the Speccy do?' Gob-smackingly beautiful. I wanted to make something like that."

Shahid was getting good at cracking into code to look and learn, though he admits he couldn't understand the Stampers' Filmation engine that powered the seminal *Knight Lore*. Instead, he bought a Microdrive for his Spectrum and began creating a room editor and isometric sprites. A robot became the main character, a decision that preceded the release of Ultimate's *Alien 8*, which appeared during *Chimera*'s development. Firebird initially rejected the game but unperturbed, Shahid beefed up the gameplay, added more puzzles and objects, put in terminals to provide in-game help and most memorably included a little bit of sampled speech, perhaps the first heard on a Spectrum. Two weeks later, he returned with his improved version and the man from Firebird said yes. "I've never been so elated in my life," he beams. "When they first heard that scream when you died, I knew I had them! I had been on the point of quitting games but now I realised this wasn't just something to do after school. This could be a career…"

The talented teenager handled the Amstrad, Atari 800 and C64 ports of *Chimera*, which not only proved lucrative, it made Shahid the go-to guy at Firebird when it came to conversions. Thus when the company licenced Ultimate's *Nightshade* for porting to the C64 in late 1985, he was the obvious man for the job. "Here was a chance of doing justice to a game I loved in a way I hadn't with *Jet Set Willy*," enthuses Shahid. "I had the tools, the time and the support. I spent many evenings on the phone to Chris Stamper [head of Ultimate with brother Tim]. At



st it was surreal, given how much of a hero he had been to me, but he was so down-to-earth, as was Tim. My respect r them only grew."

Shahid in turn earned the respect of the Stamper brothers ı delivering an impressive conversion of *Nightshade* within e month and pocketing £6500 in the process. They offered n more conversion work, this time for C64 ports of *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8*, and spoke seriously about publishing ıahid's next project, *Pandora*, through Ultimate. Most triguingly, they invited him to visit their offices as soon as m had returned from a visit to Japan with a view to perhaps ›ing part of a mysterious new project – a visit we now ıow involved meeting with Nintendo and would lead to the formation of Rare. These were exciting times for Shahid, both eatively and financially, and he was advised to hire agent ıcqui Lyons to broker the deal with Ultimate. He never heard from the Stampers again.

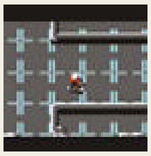
"I later learned that they don't deal with agents," he sighs. "I loved *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8* and could've done them justice on the C64. I would've done them for free, just to say I did them and did them well! It hurt that after building what seemed to be such a great relationship with the Stampers that things had to end that way. To lose that opportunity was crushing. I'm not sure I ever recovered…"

Desperately disappointed, Shahid took on a number of pot-boiler projects during 1986, including *Nihilist*, the Spectrum's answer to *Paradroid*, *Matta Blatta* for the Atari 800 and the C64 and Atari versions of *The Comet Game*, a rushed release designed to tie-in with the appearance of Halley's Comet that year and a game Shahid cheerfully admits was "diabolical". He wasn't averse to stretching his output across even more platforms, either.

"Colin Fuidge, my contact at Firebird, showed me the Commodore 16 when it came out and said, 'We don't know why but it's selling like hot cakes! We need a game,



1989 | 1991 | 1992 | 2010



PANDORA
■ **YEAR:** 1989
■ **FORMAT:** Amiga/ST
Shahid moved up to the 16-bit micros with this enhanced version of his C64 swansong, featuring some complex AI and Shakespeare quotes.



ATARI ARCADE HITS VOL. 1
■ **YEAR:** 1991
■ **FORMAT:** PC
Shahid was producer on this collection, including *Asteroids*, *Missile Command* and *Centipede*, which pioneered online leaderboards.



TENNIS PRO '92
■ **YEAR:** 1992
■ **FORMAT:**Supervision
Watara's ill-fated handheld, known as the Quickshot Supervision in the UK, hosted a number of Shahid's games, like this one.



STREET CRICKET
■ **YEAR:** 2010
■ **FORMAT:** PS2
Developed in India and a huge seller in the Asian market. A PS3 version utilising the Move controller is due for delivery soon.

Where's Willy

"Of course I knew it wasn't perfect!" exclaims Shahid, when we cruelly remind him of the swarm of bugs in his C64 conversion of *Jet Set Willy*. "Alan Maton at Software Projects said he'd give me £3000 to do it in a month, but if I did it in three weeks, he'd give me an extra grand. I was pushing my limited 6502 talent to the limit with an impossible deadline, using Macrofire, the worst assembler ever created. That's why it hurts when people say it's rubbish. If I'd had an extra few weeks for bug testing and tweaking, I could've made it better than the Spectrum version!" Shahid is thus delighted to hear that Joonas Lindberg and DanSolo, a pair of C64 scenesters, have recently fixed his code so players can complete the game, at www.c64endings.co.uk.

Shahid!' It was Friday afternoon so I said, 'I'll bring you one for Monday'."

True to his word, he bought a C16 on his way home and after a weekend getting to grips with the cut down Commodore, turned up on Monday morning with the *Asteroids*-inspired *Goldrush*. By the end of the week he'd also produced *Netrun 2000*, a *Gridrunner* clone, for the C16 and though he freely acknowledges both titles are hardly highlights of his career, they are testaments to his versatility and incredible productivity.

Shahid was taking much more time over his on-going *Pandora* project, though. He planned for the ambitious title, set on an expansive spaceship, to feature complex inter-character AI, with crew members' attitudes towards you, such as whether to trade or fight, affected by your actions. Collaborating with David Eastman, the game grew in scope and they decided to move it up to the Amiga and Atari ST, though they began working on the C64 as these exciting new machines hadn't landed on UK shores just yet.

Despite finishing the C64 version in 1986, Firebird sat on it until the 16-bit versions were ready to ship alongside it, and this year long delay took away much of the game's impact. And things were not only changing in the market by then, but in Shahid's life, too. "I think I was losing momentum," he admits. "I was still pretty upset about the whole Ultimate thing and thought I'd made the wrong decision to stick with Firebird. The company was changing – the old guard that had been so supportive and encouraging had gone, replaced by new people. After *Pandora*, I think my career started to go off the rails. It was a difficult time. My personal life was in turmoil too for reasons I'd rather not go into. To be honest, so much was changing, I started to focus more on music."

Shahid had been playing bass guitar for several years, practising during the many hours he would spend waiting for his 8-bit games to compile, so as coding began to lose its lustre, he found an interesting avenue in composing game music for titles such as Heimdall, Diplomacy and Floor 13. He's particularly proud of the Middle Eastern feel he gave to the soundtrack for *Conflict* and his score for SNES title *Fido Dido*, a finished game that sadly went unreleased. His musical work continued into the Nineties on such console titles as *The Last Action Hero* and *Terminator 2* for BITS. The company was looking to produce titles for a new handheld, the Supervision, and knowing Shahid was a polished 6502 programmer, they gave him responsibility for all aspects of game development.



» [C64] Getting to port Ultimate's *Nightshade* to the C64 was a dream gig for such a fan of the Stamper brothers' work

> **"I loved both the Commodore 64 and the Spectrum. I had a real techno lust and an insatiable hunger to program"**
>
> *Shahid brings love not war to the C64 vs Speccy conflict*



» [PS2] *Total Overdose* was given a shot in the arm through Shahid's START Games initiative.

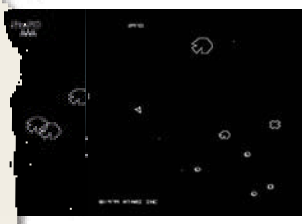


Ahmad on Ahmad

Shahid picks his three favourite projects from his long career



■ **CHIMERA (C64)**
Just before *Chimera*, I was close to quitting videogames. Seeing *Knight Lore* in December 1984 changed the course of my life. It was such a shock, but also a provocation. "I can't believe what I'm seeing" was soon replaced by "I can do this". I came close and my career took off.



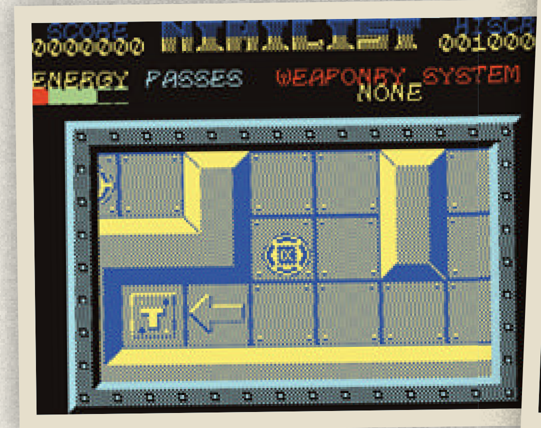
■ **ATARI ARCADE HITS 1 (PC)**
As much of a pain as it was, I really enjoyed working on it. What makes a game fun to work on is if you're surrounded by extremely competent people. Peter Morawiec, who was the designer and artist, is a brilliant guy and he made it a pleasure.

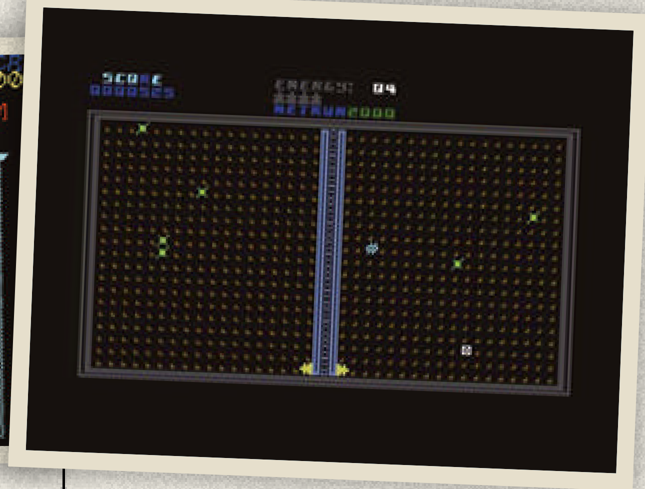


■ **PLAYSTATION MOBILE (PS3)**
This project has involved a huge level of engagement with the inspirational assistance of the independent games development community. It gives me enormous satisfaction to see the smallest indie devs stand shoulder to shoulder with the largest companies.

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

Nihilist (Spectrum) was a fine homage to the C64's Paradroid.





Readers' Questions

Merman: What does it feel like to have a project cancelled?

It's hideous. Demoralising, painful, wasteful and it makes you question everything you're doing. But you have to put it into perspective. The rent got paid, the kids got fed and you move onto the next thing. And next time it'll be better!

Northway: How did you get into the magazines with your 'one week porting' thing?

I'd done *Chimera* on the C64 game and I wanted to get it on more platforms. I had to put a spin on it as they weren't biting, so I said I'd do an Amstrad version in one week. Colin at Firebird said, 'no, the Amstrad hasn't sold enough', but I said, 'Come on, give me a week!' The next time I was in the office, Colin said, oh *C&VG* want to do a story on you about this one week *Chimera* conversion. I'd not really meant it; I was just trying to get a deal! I had to put my money where my mouth was. I said 'Okay, but I'd better buy an Amstrad first as I don't know anything about them.' It actually took me eight days to finish it but that's okay as programmers count from zero.

ParanoidMarvin: In *Jet Set Willy* on the C64, is there any reason why *Two-Part Invention No. 1, in C Major* (by Bach) is used as the in-game music instead of *If I Were A Rich Man*.

My friend Jason did the arrangement of that music for the game. We weren't tied to using the original Spectrum music and the most annoying thing about *Jet Set Willy* to me was that music! Everything else about the game was perfect, a work of art, but the music just looped too quickly. I adored the title screen theme, *Moonlight Sonata*, though. I have that as a Spectrum audio file permanently burned into my memory.

MikeB: What was your motivation for remaking *Chimera*?

This time I wanted to get it right. It means a lot to me. It's not just about getting the project right, it's about getting my life right, my attitude and commitment to it right, so it almost produces itself. Sounds ridiculously philosophical. I've done a version of the original for free, where you can swap in and out any of the 8-bit graphics apart from the Spectrum version, and then I'll start working on *Chimera 2*!



"After my personal crisis, this was a way I could have total control over a project," he explains, "and it was a nice little machine, with a decent enough processor. I always like new hardware, that technical challenge… I didn't know or care about the business side of the Supervision!"

Shahid produced three titles for the machine; versions of his own *Chimera* and *Matta Blatta* and *Tennis Pro '92*, one of his few forays into sports sims. Sadly, the 'business side' of the Supervision project led to the console's swift demise, and so he returned to his audio work. By the mid-Nineties, Shahid was increasingly taking on the role of producer on such titles as *F16 Aggressor* and both volumes of the well-received *Atari Arcade Hits*. The position proved to be rewarding and frustrating in equal measure – *Glover 2* and the promising Argonaut title *Cash On Delivery* were both cancelled on his watch – but the project management and people skills he learned while involved with this production work proved to be invaluable.

As the new millennium dawned, Shahid was involved with START Games, an interesting start-up business designed to help developers create prototypes of original games to attract publishers. The brilliantly titled *Criminalympics* never made it past the demo stage but Shahid had more success with *Overdose*, which was picked up and became the entertaining Mexican mayhem of *Total Overdose*. His commitment to backing new and innovative projects can be seen in his current role at Sony, where he's been a prime mover in their India Programme.

"Helping to build the console development eco system in India was one of the most exciting things I've ever been involved in," he says, bubbling with enthusiasm. "As the country continues to develop, it's going to become an economic powerhouse. Our goal was to engage with the development community over there and introduce them to the potential of developing on Sony platforms."

The initiative has already enjoyed much success, with *Street Cricket* selling a quarter of a million copies on PS2 and PSP, both platforms still very much alive over there. Shahid has broken more new ground in his work with PSP Minis, various PlayStation Network titles and his current work on PlayStation Mobile content acquisition. "I started meeting a new crowd," he grins, "guys making games for the love of it! It made me realise I needed to do something to wake up that creative spirit, that passion. That was what it was all about back in the Eighties."

Suitably inspired by the indie developers he was supporting, Shahid decided to return to one of his best-loved 8-bit games and if you visit his website www.chimera2010.com you can freely download a PC update of *Chimera*. So is his passion for programming undiminished, three decades after he first persuaded his mum to buy him that Atari?

"It's totally embedded in me, almost to a spiritual degree," he smiles. "I got bitten by the bug very young. And, you know, my mum still asks me to this day where the map of London is I owe her."

Trivia

As well as writing three games for the Supervision handheld, a short-lived contender to the Game Boy crown, Shahid contributed the music to two other titles, *Snake* and *Olympic Trials*.

> "If I'd had another few weeks, I could have made Jet Set Willy on the C64 better than the Spectrum version!"
>
> *On trying to construct Willy's mansion in just three weeks*

Many thanks to Vinny Mainolfi of www.c64endings.co.uk and Martyn Carroll for their help with this piece and to Geoff Foley for giving Shahid the Spectrum leaflet that changed his life.





» [PS1/N64] Shahid's production …ties in the Nineties included both *Glover* (PS1) and the unreleased *Glover 2* (N64).

Shahid Ahmad

Desert Island Disks

The games that Shahid Ahmad just couldn't live without and why he loves them

01



02



03



04



05



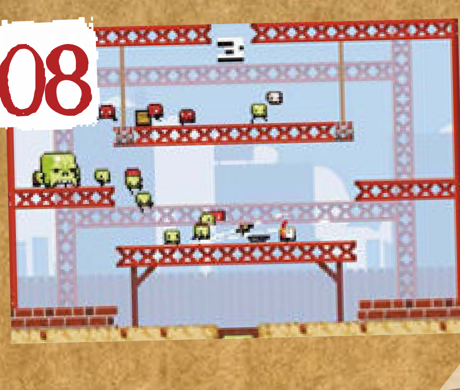
06



07



08



01 Star Raiders (ATARI 400)

Bit-for-bit, probably the greatest videogame programming accomplishment in history. An 8K miracle, the audio-visual experience was light-years ahead of anything else and the game design and balancing were almost unbearably good.

02 Jet Set Willy (ZX SPECTRUM)

This game possessed me. I left my Spectrum on when I was asleep with a cushion on it so I could come back to it in the morning without having to wait for it to load. The freedom to explore was mind expanding. I loved it so deeply, I converted it to the C64.

03 Super Mario Kart (SNES)

I played this for two years, every single day, for two hours a day, one and two player. I kept getting better. Probably the best balanced videogame ever written. A masterpiece.

04 Speedball II (AMIGA)

"Ice cream! Ice cream!" It's hard to pick out a single title from the golden Amiga era, but this game gave me RSI and had believable and reliable AI. It had that feeling of solidity and it was brutal. Brutal deluxe.

05 Ultima Underworld (PC)

A year before this came out I had a vivid dream of a game in which I was the protagonist facing skeletons in a 3D environment. *The Stygian Abyss* was that dream made real. This game made buying a monster PC a priority. It was by far the most deeply immersive and engaging game I'd ever played to that point. I still remember the battle music. Lights out, sound up, exhilarating genius.

06 God Of War (PS2)

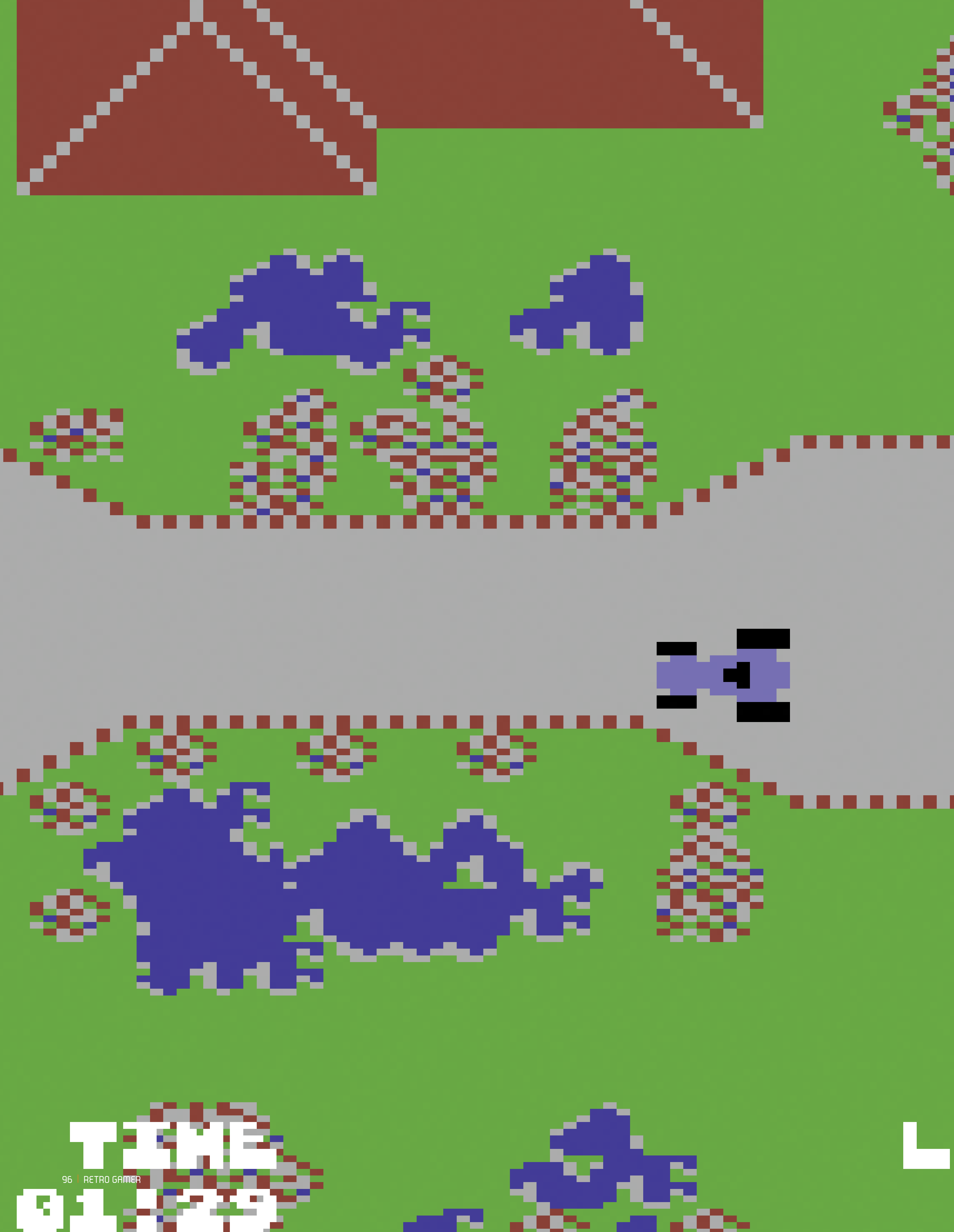
This is one videogame for which the word "epic" is wholly apt. An absolute masterpiece of design, progression, adrenaline, fury, story-telling and character development, the score is a masterpiece, the visuals were shockingly good and it is one of very few games I went back and replayed at a harder level. An utter triumph.

07 Super Stardust HD (PS3)

The greatest twin-stick shooter ever made, supremely balanced, shockingly addictive, technically superlative, great music, retro-remade done better than anything else I can think of. At one point, I was in the world's top 50 on several of the leaderboards. The updates were a joy too. This was like crack for the eyes.

08 Super Crate Box (PSVITA)

I'm proud of all of the PlayStation Mobile titles I signed, but my personal favourite is this and it had to be on the PS Vita because there is no better way to play the game than with "proper" controls. The game is deceptively simple at first glance, but every hour of play reveals greater nuances, depth and balancing that show just how deeply considered the gameplay is. I never thought so much thought and love could go into a single-screen game. My best score is 306.


TIME



Rally Speedway

COMMODORE'S MICRO MACHINES

» RETROREVIVAL



» C64
» COMMODORE BUSINESS MACHINES INC
» 1984

I'm sure a few readers are aware that both Darran and I owned Amstrads growing up. I was slightly more fortunate though as I got one with a colour monitor, while poor Darran was forced to stare at a dismal green screen when playing *Rainbow Islands*.

I was also lucky enough to have friends with Spectrums and Commodore 64s, and therefore got to experience plenty of games that I otherwise wouldn't have been able to.

One C64 game I always remember enjoying was *Rally Speedway*. Written by John Anderson and published by Commodore Business Machines Inc, *Rally Speedway*'s gameplay and two-player mode shares a lot in common with Micro Machines.

Rally Speedway is a simple, unassuming looking overhead racer with bags of playability and fun 'drift' controls. Before starting a race you are presented with a menu screen that allows you to fiddle around with various race settings – from your car's top speed and road conditions, right down to the acceleration rate of your vehicle.

Races are played out on a single track, with you racing on empty roads trying to set the fastest lap time you can. If playing in 'real life' mode, as apposed to 'only in a computer', you have to also watch out for the trees and houses that border the track. Hitting them causes your car to explode, and a flame-covered driver to emerge from the wreckage and start rolling around on the floor to extinguish themselves.

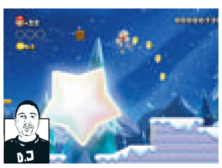
Despite having just a solitary track, variety and longevity is covered via a simple pick-and-place track editor, which allows you to create and race on your own tweaked version of the circuit. The two-player mode is also good for a laugh too. Playing in a similar way to the superb versus mode in *Micro Machines*, players battle it out to race each other off the screen, either by taking corners tidier or resorting to bashing your rival into incoming obstacles.

Rally Speedway is a superb little racer that beyond its simplicity is a surprisingly polished and fun little racer that fans of *Micro Machines* should certainly check out.



>> This month we got to play Sumo's fantastic love letter to Sega. We've also managed to get our hands on New Super Mario Bros U, take PlayStation All-Stars for a rumble, and revisit Baldur's Gate

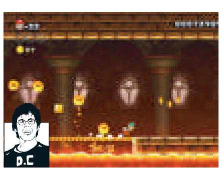
✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
New Super Mario Bros U
It's not massively original, but there's no denying that Mario's latest game is rather ace.



STUART
Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed
A tremendous tribute to all things Sega and a fantastic racing game in its own right.



DAVID
New Super Mario Bros U
More *Mario* magic from Nintendo. It's not very original, but it's a lot of fun to play.

Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed



SECOND TIME'S THE CHARM, BUT THAT TITLE'S GETTING NO BETTER

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3, WII U, 3DS, VITA, PC, IOS
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** SUMO DIGITAL
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-10

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Sega All-Stars Racing* forms part of the *Sega Superstar* series, a series of games starring a blend of characters from different Sega games. The series also includes *Sega Superstars* and *Sega Superstars Tennis*. Sumo Digital (*OutRun 2*) developed the *All-Star* series.

✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
DIDDY KONG RACING (N64)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
MARIO KART 7 (3DS)





We enjoyed the original *Sonic & Sega All Stars Racing* but it was far from perfect. Feeling a little less than the sum of its parts, it contained some pretty sharp difficult spikes and an item unlock system that allowed you to simply buy your way to its unlockable content rather than make you put the work in. Ultimately though, it just felt more like a *Mario Kart* clone than a much-needed gear change the kart-racer genre was in so desperate need of.

Well Sumo Digital has clearly been listening intently to fan feedback, and in doing so delivered a superb sequel that even the most zealous of Nintendo fanboy would be hard pressed to pick holes in. While the original felt like a mesh of *Mario Kart* and *OutRun 2*, *Transformed* almost feels like a crazy jam of *Diddy Kong Racing*, *Wave Race 64* and *Pilotwings*. And this is thanks to its roster of Sega stars now riding in transformable land, sea and air vehicles across some exhilarating tracks that make great use of these different forms.

Save for the transforming vehicles, which change automatically when you drive through gates scattered around the tracks, the driving mechanics haven't changed all that much from the previous game. Drifting works the same way as before, allowing you to increase the power of your boost by up to three stages through sustained sliding. Plus, you can also generate extra speed boosts though airborne tricks, which are performed via a quick tap of the right analog stick.

Transformed is said to have an improved physics engine, and this is something that may explain why the vehicles now feel a bit weightier and steer more solidly. This is at its most noticeable during the boat sections, which (and the *Panzer Dragoon*-inspired circuit is a great example) feature a variety of neat wave and water effects that

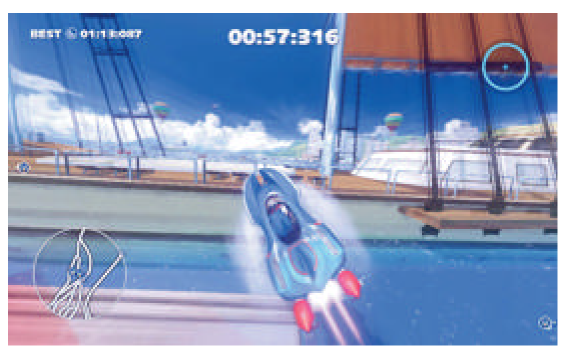




» [Xbox 360] Even some non-Sega characters get in on the racing action. They include Wreck-It Ralph and race car driver Danica Patrick. Who's that, then…?

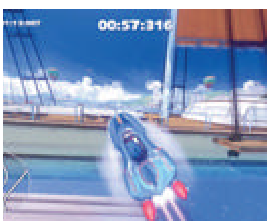


» [Xbox 360] Some of the Sega franchises that debut include *Golden Axe, After Burner*, and *Panzer Dragoon*.









Planes, boats and automobiles

The most dramatic and obvious change that *Transformed* makes to the series is that the races now play out across land, water and in the air and the karts transform in response to handle each environment. Each vehicle type handles differently to the next and all will require mastery. The plane is the fastest form in the game and also the easiest vehicle to self-boost with. The boat is the slowest, and is probably the hardest to handle owing to the way it realistically reacts to the water, something which also makes aiming weapons more difficult. The kart is probably the most fun and enjoyable vehicle to use, especially as the drifting works really well, but all do well to complement one another.

cause the vehicles to bob about and jump realistically in the water.

The tracks all are very well designed and, like the vehicles, transform during races. Each lap will often offer something new to gawp at, and in some instances even the layout of the track will change. While having so much happening away from the racing combined with the multi-routed and shifting nature of the circuits can sometimes make finding your way around the tracks a bit confusing at times, we quickly found ourselves getting to grips with them and enjoying the fact we were racing in environments that offered something new and entertaining to take in on each lap.

The improvements don't end there though, as the way in which you unlock new content has also been rethought. Accompanying the standard Grand Prix mode, *Transformed* has introduced a new World Tour mode. The real meat of the game, it sees you racing through a branching series of races and time-based

OPINION



I was a big fan of the original game and it's good to see Sumo has improved upon it in almost all areas. It can be a little disorienting at times and the jump between the higher difficulty levels is a little brutal, but there's no denying the sheer amount of satisfaction you get from racing around the classically designed levels. A fantastic racer that everyone should own.

Darran Jones



★GO DEEPER

>> Sumo Digital also developed *Sega Superstars Tennis,* another game in the *Sega Superstar* series.

>> The first game to star a crossover of Sega characters was *Fighters Megamix* on the Sega Saturn.

» [Xbox 360] Several new weapons are introduced, including one that unleashes a swarm of wasps at the race leader.

challenges – which vary from objectives like sustained drifting, eliminating rival racers, to weaving through traffic to reach a certain number of checkpoints. It is in this mode that new characters, vehicle mods and tracks can be unlocked, and the racing mechanics can be learnt and mastered. Both modes also let you attack them in a variety of different challenge settings, which helps to add more longevity the game and, through earning XP, mods can be earned that let you designate enhanced handling, speed and boost stats to vehicles.

Of course, the other great thing about *Transformed* is the amount of fan service it contains. From the varied roster of popular Sega stars and imagination packed into its track design to its rousing remix soundtrack, Sumo does a superb job in doing Sega and its fans proud. Be it the exhilarating mid-ocean *After Burner* circuit that sees you racing beside military hovercrafts and supersonic planes, or the *NiGHTS* stage that manages to cram in its own boss battles, Sumo succeeds in capturing the essence of each game and constructs a fitting tribute to each. It almost feels like being inside a Sega theme park, one full of Sega-themed rollercoaster rides.

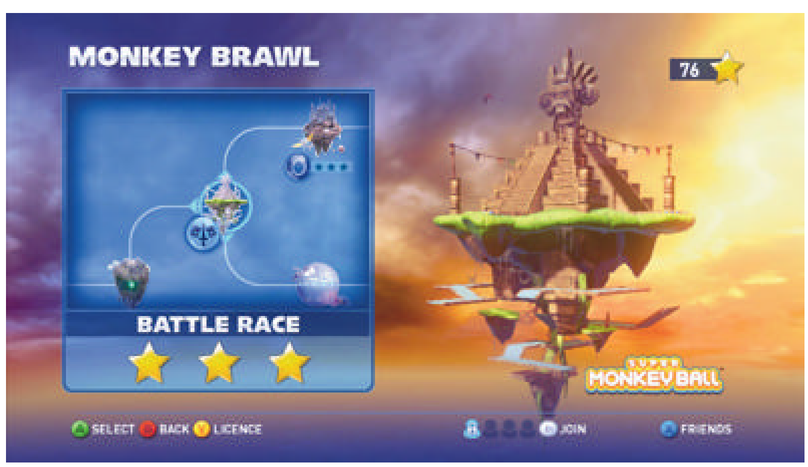
retro GAMER SIZZLER

If we had to pick fault in *Transformed* then we'd have to say that the boat sections don't feel as well crafted or enjoyable as the other segments, the frame-rate does occasionally dip when there's a lot happening on screen, and there's still quite a jump in the difficulty levels between the different classes, but these are minor niggles. There is no denying that Sumo has succeeded in crafting one of the most amusing and exhilarating kart racers in a long while, one that in some areas even manages to outshine the mighty *Mario Kart*.

In a nutshell

One of the best mascot racers we've played in a while, *Transformed* is well designed and packed with variety, fun and fan service. Sumo and Sega have taken the trophy from Nintendo.

>> Score **90%**



» [Xbox 360] *Transformed* features a new World Tour mode where you compete in challenges and win stars for unlockables.



★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind New Super Mario Bros U

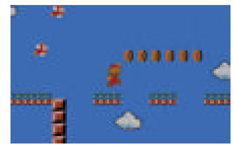
>> This is the first *Mario* launch game on a home console since *Super Mario 64* on the N64.

>> As with other new Nintendo games, a Super Guide mode kicks in if you lose ten lives on a level.

>> Challenge Mode boasts plenty of fun challenges and is a great addition to the series.

★ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SUPER MARIO BROS (NES)

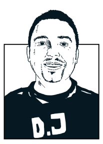


▽ SOMETHING NEW
GIANA SISTERS: TWISTED DREAMS (PC)



NINTENDO'S BIGGEST MASCOT MEETS HIGH DEFINITION

New Super Mario Bros U



The most obvious thing you notice upon starting *New Super Mario Bros U* is that *Mario* looks absolutely lovely in high definition. Layer-Cake Desert, Frosted Glacier and Meringue Clouds are variations of game worlds that have been seen many times, but they're given a vibrancy here that makes them a joy to explore.

And explore you will, because New *Super Mario Bros U* is stuffed with all sorts of delicious secrets. As with past games, three coins are hidden on each stage and you'll need to use all your resources to find them. It's a surprisingly tough game in places as well, with certain levels eagerly eating into the many lives you accrue.

In terms of new gameplay mechanics pickings are relatively slim – one of *New Super Mario Bros U*'s only real failings. There's a new Super Acorn power-up, which gives you the ability to glide and cling to walls and a variety of cute little Yoshis to discover. Scattered throughout the game's eight main worlds, they offer a number of abilities, from blowing bubbles – which can be used to bounce on and turn enemies into coins – to being used as giant balloons. While they're certainly a nice touch, they do feel a little underused.

There are also some slick additional game modes, including Challenge Mode, Coin Battle and the highly entertaining Boost Rush Mode, which has the level auto scrolling faster and faster as you pick up more coins.

In terms of Wii U mechanics, the only one of any real note is the Boost Mode, which is used in multiplayer games. By tapping the screen, a friend can create platforms and stun enemies to help out everybody playing the main game. It's a nice touch, but does little to show off the new hardware.

That gripe aside, it's difficult to not fall for *Mario*'s charms. Yes it remains a chaotic experience when playing with a group of friends, but sit down with it by yourself and you'll discover that it's easily the best game in the *New Super Mario Bros* series.

INFORMATION

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WII U

» **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A

» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW

» **PRICE:** £44.99

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO EAD

» **PLAYERS:** 1-4

BRIEF HISTORY

» The first *Super Mario Bros* game appeared in 1985 on the NES and proved to be a massive success for Nintendo. A spin-off series, *New Super Mario Bros*, was created for the DS in 2006, carrying across many of the core elements from the original NES games. This is the fourth game in the *New* series.

OPINION

It doesn't do much to make use of the Wii U's unique capabilities, but there's no denying the quality of *Mario*'s latest platformer. The main game is packed with secrets and great level design, while the additional modes – the various tasks you have to tackle in Challenge Mode are a standout – offer plenty of replay value.

In a nutshell

There aren't many new ideas on offer, but the platforming and level design are as exemplary as ever. An enjoyable and highly entertaining platformer that proves Nintendo still has the old magic.

>> **Score 86%**

» [Wii U] We're still not huge fans of multiplayer *Mario*. It does feel a little more refined compared to past games though.





» [Wii U] *New Super Mario Bros U* is a lot trickier than past games, with the Ghost Houses being particularly devious.

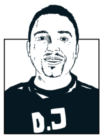


» [Wii U] The Baby Yoshis are a nice addition to the game, but aren't used as often as we'd like.

PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale

A SMASH BROS CLONE TEN YEARS TOO EARLY

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS VITA » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PUBLISHER:** SCEE » **DEVELOPER:** BLUEPOINT GAMES » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



>> **From the moment** you start playing *PlayStation All-Stars* it becomes obvious that this is no *Super Smash Bros*. It certainly looks similar with its plethora of characters dating back to the original PlayStation, and many elements feel the same, but kudos to the developers for trying something different with Nintendo's classic formula.

The most obvious is the focus on scoring points by taking out other characters solely with super moves. It's a clever idea, with the three available levels offering a surprising amount of strategy, due to their overall effectiveness in fights. The core combat mechanics are also surprisingly deep, offering plenty of moves with attacks differing depending on which direction and attack you use.

Online integration is also strong, with solid and stable play, which rarely stuttered, even when playing with three other players. We also like the way levels mash up, starting off as one game background, before being rudely interrupted by another. It's something of a shame then that *PlayStation All-Stars* is let down by numerous niggles that get in the way of all the fun brawling.

The available items are extremely weak, adding little of the excitement that marked the appearance of items in *Smash Bros*, while there's a distinct lack of decent gameplay modes for solo players. There's also an over-reliance on characters with similar move sets, which shrinks the paltry selection of characters even further.

PlayStation All-Stars is a fun brawler, and a good alternative to the fighters already available on Vita. Just don't expect a proper *Smash Bros* clone.

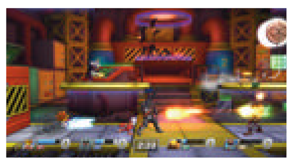
>> Score **70%**

VITA



» [PS Vita] Sadly let down by the lack of Crash Bandicoot, Lara Croft and Spyro.

» [PS Vita] There's a noticeable drop in detail compared to the PS3 version, but it still runs at a fast pace.



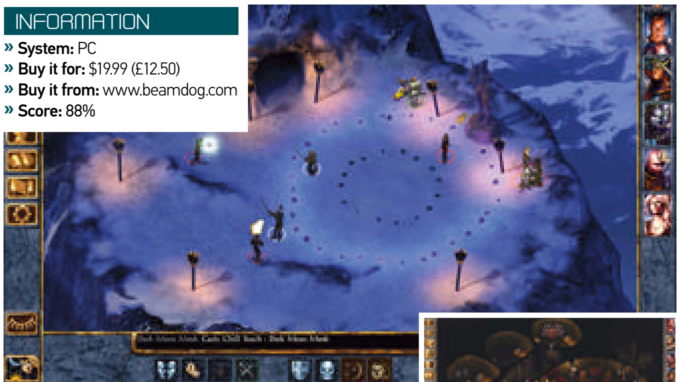


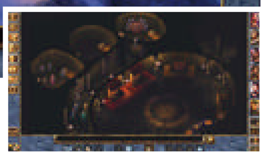
RETRO ROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download



★ DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH





INFORMATION
- » **System:** PC
- » **Buy it for:** $19.99 (£12.50)
- » **Buy it from:** www.beamdog.com
- » **Score:** 88%

Baldur's Gate Enhanced Edition

For many, *Baldur's Gate* remains a watershed moment of Nineties PC gaming. It came along when both the Western RPG and *Dungeons & Dragons* were floundering and injected fresh new life into both.

For those who have never played *Baldur's Gate* before, Bioware's RPG tells the story of a young ward who is thrust into a deadly adventure when he uncovers a plot to kill him. Escaping with his ward and trusted friend Imoen, he's soon finds himself at the centre of a dire conspiracy that will shape both his future and the fate of the Forgotten Realms.

It's a clichéd story to be sure, but it's filled with all manner of entertaining plot twists and characters, particularly your teammates, who slowly join you as the story progresses. Beamdog have included three new heroes as well, who fit in remarkably well with the original core story, while improvements from *Baldur's Gate 2*, such as sub-races and class kits are also available.

Other additions include a slight refinement of the game engine (it now runs full screen), new menus that are a little less clunkier and easier to navigate than before and the inclusion of *Tales From The Sword Coast*, which originally started off life as a separate expansion. There's also a brand new scenario called The Black Pits, which pits your party against increasingly tougher opponents. Unfortunately, it's not connected to the main adventure, making it feel like something of a missed opportunity.

It's certainly more expensive than the original version which is available on GOG, but it does without the multitude of mods and tweaks that version needs to see it at its best. If you've not played *Baldur's Gate*, this is the perfect place to start, but we feel the iOS version may be the one to own.

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



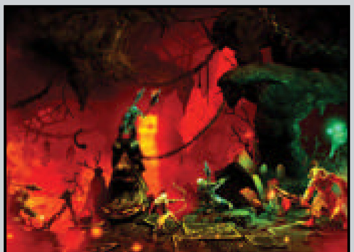
Skylanders Giants
- » **System:** Wii
- » **Buy it for:** £59.99
- » **Buy it from:** Online, retail
- » **Score:** 68%

» Spyro's latest adventure sticks rigorously to last year's template, which means it's another cracking *Diablo/Gauntlet* clone that's accessible enough for kids, but won't put adults off either. There's far more meat to this sequel as well thanks to a far stronger challenge mode, a better focus on multiplayer, and a brand new card game. It will be too twee for some, but it remains an entertaining *Gauntlet* clone.



Worms Reloaded
- » **System:** PC
- » **Buy it for:** £17.99
- » **Buy it from:** www.steampowered.com
- » **Score:** 82%

» With a redesigned engine that captures the classic 2D look of old, and a glut of new and classic weapons, *Worms Reloaded* remains as finely balanced as ever. There's two fairly large campaigns, with the Warzone offering being a particular challenge, while the new Bodycount Mode (one worm against endlessly respawning enemies) is a nice take on the Horde modes of other games. Highly recommended.



Trine 2: Director's Cut
- » **System:** Wii U
- » **Buy it for:** £13.99
- » **Buy it from:** Nintendo eShop
- » **Score:** 85%

» This Wii U port contains a brand new level and the *Goblin Menace* expansion, making for 20 levels of classic strategic platforming. Think of a stunningly beautiful *Lost Vikings* with beautiful visuals and you'll have a good idea of what to expect from Frozenbite's game. Touch controls take a while to get used to (although you can use more traditional controls) but this remains a superb puzzle platformer.



Sonic The Fighters
- » **System:** Xbox 360
- » **Buy it for:** 400 Points
- » **Buy it from:** Xbox Live Arcade
- » **Score:** 48%

» While we're certainly glad that Sega is continuing to deliver solid ports of its back catalogue, *Sonic The Fighters* is one step too far. While it utilises the same three-button setup as *Virtua Fighter*, it lacks the pacing, skill and depth of AM2's stunning fighting franchise. It's certainly amusing watching Sonic and co kick the snot out of each other, and the price is commendable, but this remains a poor brawler.



Epic Mickey: Power Of Illusion

» **System:** 3DS » **Buy it for:** £34.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail » **Score:** 57%

If you're going to mention *Castle Of Illusion* in your game, then make sure you can at least compete with the classic platformer. *Power Of Illusion* tries hard, but Mickey's greatest enemy isn't the many delightful bosses he encounters, but increasing boredom. There's a blandness to *Illusion* that just doesn't sit well with us, leaving a game that looks absolutely beautiful on the outside (even if it does look more like a SNES Mickey game) but feels rather hollow and soulless.

Gameplay revolves around rescuing classic characters and performing simple fetch quests for them. You'll encounter certain objects that need to be created or erased using your magic paintbrush. It's cute at first, but becomes laborious and feels at odds with the core platforming at *Illusion*'s centre. The platforming on offer is decent, with Mickey boasting the same bottom bounce controls like he had in *Castle Of Illusion*, along with new skills like a whirlwind attack.

Power Of Illusion is a perfectly serviceable platformer, and a diverting timewaster, but it fails to live up to the legacy of its 16-bit predecessor.



Time for a little trumpet blowing because the results for 2012's ABBUC competition for Atari 8-bit software are in and my game Callisto took second place. Hooray for me! Of course there won't be a review in Retro Gamer since I might be just slightly biased – apparently giving my own release 105% isn't allowed, who knew – but readers wanting to give it a blast can download it if they like from www.cosine.org.uk

DANCE LIKE NOBODY IS WATCHING

HARDSYNC 1ST MIX



» [C64] It's a ten from Len.



» [C64] You put your left leg in.

X is one of the biggest marks on the C64 demoscene's calendar, a bi-annual event held in the Netherlands that attracts over two hundred attendees and the cream of the demo coding crop, which invariably results in some stunning releases. But, while those productions are well worth a look for anybody interested in demos, there's a smaller sister gathering called Y held not long afterwards in Sweden which we're more interested in, mainly because the 2012 iteration gave us *Hardsync 1st Mix*, a *Dance Dance Revolution*-inspired rhythm and dance game for a C64 equipped with a dance mat.

Yes we did indeed say a dance mat, a PlayStation dance mat to be more specific, connected via either a PSX64 interface or for the more adventurous, there's the option of modifying a pad or following developer Linus Åkesson's plans for his own interface – emulator users can either use a joypad or connect a mat using a PS to USB converter.

The game itself should be familiar to anybody who has previously seen a *Dance Dance Revolution* or *Dancing Stage* arcade machine in action. Arrows move up the abstractly animated play area, arriving at the row of static arrows at the top on beats in the music and the player must press the corresponding direction control to score; each move is scored based on timing so the closer it is to perfect the more points are earned. But scoring isn't the only objective, a bar at the bottom of the play area which starts at the halfway mark is filled by successful moves and drained by mistakes, and if it should empty entirely, the game is over. Once the song is finished, the player's performance is rated.

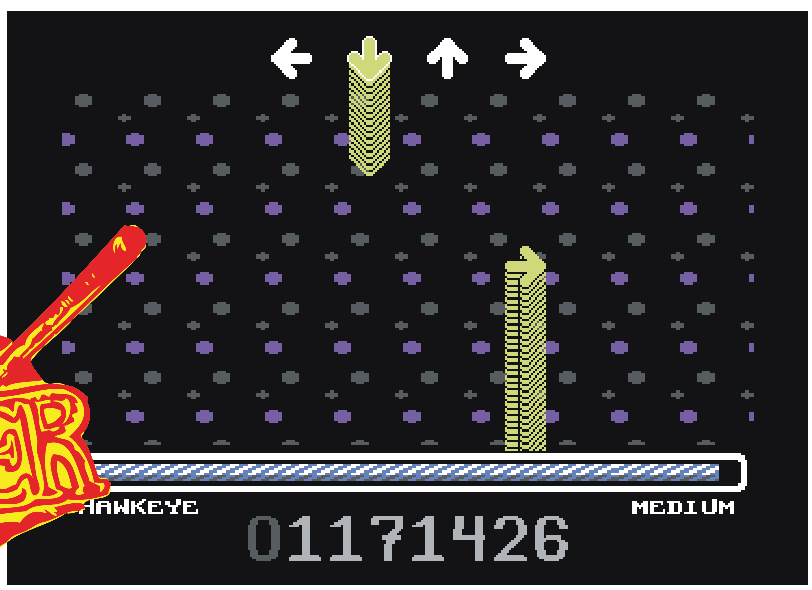
The selection of music included is eclectic, with the eight tunes supplied with this first release coming from both games and demos, meaning that Rob Hubbard's *Commando* and *International Karate* soundtracks share a stage with Johannes Bjerregaard's *Shape* from the Upfront demo *Freezer*, *Complications* by Tomas Danko – more known from the Amiga version used in the Fairlight demo *In My Room* – and Jeroen Tel's title tune for *Hawkeye*. Three difficulty settings are offered for each tune and there are also options to slow the music to half speed, disable the game over if the status bar is emptied or turn off the animated backgrounds if they prove too distracting. There's even room for expansion, included with documentation on the developer's website explaining how to create new levels which should hopefully see further mixes released.

The only real negative is that, while *Hardsync 1st Mix* can still be frantically entertaining while playing alone using a joystick or control pad, the full experience really requires a small crowd of players and a dance mat to be enjoyed properly, the latter because some of the levels need up and down or left and right to be pressed simultaneously. This is one of those games best played with friends around, when they're drunk and there's a camcorder handy.



FORMAT: C64
DEVELOPER: LINUS "LFT" ÅKESSON
LINK: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/HARDSYNC
RELEASE: 2012
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

retro GAMER SIZZLER



» [C64] Waaaaait for it…

91%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

DOWN

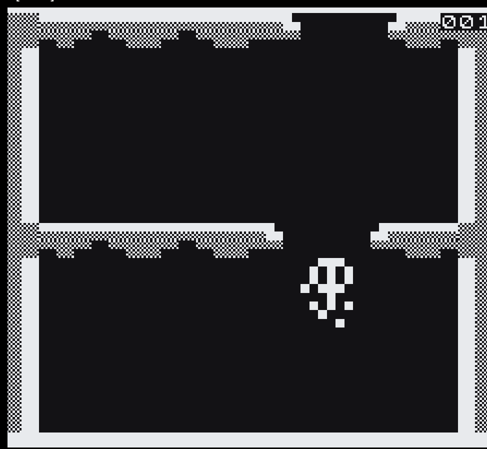
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK
» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR ZX81 » **DEVELOPER:** REVIVAL STUDIOS
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/DOWN-ZX81 » **PRICE:** FREE

Caverns are dangerous places and not somewhere to be running and falling for your life, but that's what has happened to the player's avatar in Revival Studios' new ZX81 game *Down* after their village was ransacked. The player only has the option of moving left or right while relying on gravity to fall between platforms as they scroll upwards and, unlike similar games such as *Man Goes Down* or *Downfall*, reaching the bottom of the play area isn't fatal; the only way to die is to be crushed at the top of the screen by the scrolling.

This is an interesting twist to the game mechanic because players can spend more time keeping ahead of the game and collecting the occasional score bonuses rather than trying to keep to the middle. The replay value comes from scoring well by surviving and collecting bonuses with exceptional scores meriting registration at Revival's website.

82%

» [ZX81] Wheeee!



ASTEROIDS EMULATOR

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK
» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** NORBERT KEHRER
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/ASTEROIDS-EMU-A8 » **PRICE:** FREE

Although new display code has been written for the Atari 8-bit to convert the vector-based graphics to bitmap, the original ROMs from the coin-operated version of *Asteroids* have been used in the making of this game which probably makes it one of the most accurate 8-bit versions released.

The original controls have been remapped for a standard one button joystick, with left and right rotating the ship, up firing thrusters, down triggering the ever temperamental hyperspace and fire blasting the chunks of space rock into ever smaller pieces until they're destroyed entirely.

This accuracy of *Asteroids Emulator* does mean that, while it plays a great game of *Asteroids*, there are some serious issues with speed and even the first stage struggles, with things getting worse as the asteroid count increases; considering what it's doing technically we can understand why these speed changes happen and, while they do have an effect on the gameplay, it's still a more solid rendition than Atari's own attempt.

72%



» [Atari 8-bit] Better looking than the official conversion!

» [Amstrad CPC] Make the sign of the Eye, Scarman.



TOTEMS

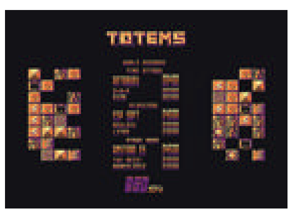
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK
» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC » **DEVELOPER:** ESP SOFT
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/TOTEMS-CPC » **PRICE:** FREE

***Totems* is a** sequel to ESP Soft's 2004 release *Columns* and, generally speaking at least, the basic gameplay hasn't changed. The player gains score by creating horizontal, vertical or diagonal lines of the same symbol. In fact the most striking difference between this and its prequel is the addition of a two player simultaneous play option, pitting two humans against each other.

There's a classical mode which keeps playing until the well is too full to add another column, a time attack where the player has three minutes to get the highest possible score and stage mode which has short rounds which must be completed in an equally small time limit - the latter is swapped out for a versus option for two player games and there are easy, medium and hard difficulty settings for all modes.

Despite being a sequel, Totems manages to hold its own as a rendition of *Columns*, improving on the original attempt in pretty much every gameplay and cosmetic department.

86%



» [Amstrad CPC] At the top of the totem.

WHAT'S BREWING?

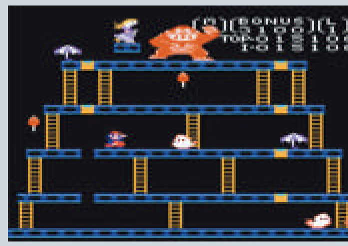
All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Atari 2600] Classic wireframe action.

>> TIME TO ROCK!

Space Rocks is a remake of *Asteroids* – with some elements from *Asteroids Deluxe* grafted on top – which utilises the ARM chip at the heart of the Harmony SD card cartridge and Atari Age's Melody boards for the Atari 2600, meaning that the 2600's CPU isn't working alone. The screenshot is from a beta version using test graphics but it already looks great. Further information is at www.kikstart.eu/space-rocks-2600



» [Atari 7800] How high can you get?

>> MAKING A MONKEY

On the subject of Atari console games using upgrades, *Donkey Kong XM* for the Atari 7800 with XM expansion isn't a new game but takes the original release and bolts in missing level data, support for a POKEY sound chip, the "How high can you get?" screen and other tweaks and cosmetic details. The author is currently only taking pre-orders until the XM itself has been released. www.kikstart.eu/donkey-xm-7800



» [Atari 8-bit] Say no more, guv'nor.

>> GALLIVANTING UP THERE LIKE KANGAROOS

The author of *Mary Poppins* had planned to enter it into the 2012 ABBUC competition but sadly missed the deadline so released it a few days afterwards. It's an Atari 8-bit game based on... well, *Mary Poppins*, and sees her take to the skies with her umbrella; we're not sure that it's "practically perfect in every way" yet, but the game is available to download from his website at www.grevle.net

HOMEBREW

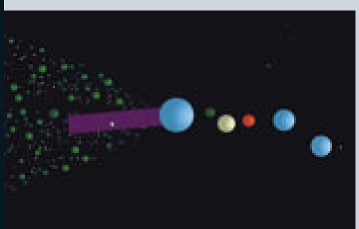
>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

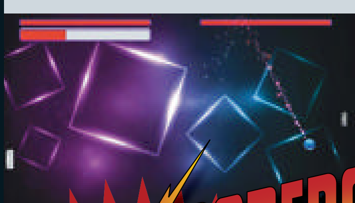
>> GATHER AROUND ME

Main Sequence might not be the most visually attractive game on the Xbox Live Indie service, but put that aside and it seems to be a surprisingly addictive game based on PC indie release *Osmos*. The player controls a rock with aspirations. The rock must absorb smaller objects around it while avoiding the bigger ones until it grows large enough to become a star itself. Of course it isn't that simple and there is the troublesome issue of losing some mass when moving around large bodies with gravity to contend with as well. www.kikstart.eu/main-seq-xblig



>> WHAT'S THAT PONG?

Yes, it's another *Pong* clone, but one with pretty particle effects! Okay, that's not much of a selling point and it isn't as though nobody else has tried to remake *Pong* but, whilst we've only given it a quick try, *Piz-ong* does at least seem to play a reasonable single player game for a change so www.kikstart.eu/pizong-xblig is the place to go if you fancy some paddle on ball action.



FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer's** Flash game of the month. This month, *Creepy Couples*.

THIS LOOKS LIKE ANOTHER MATCH THREE GAME BUT THERE'S A TWIST; THE PLAYER CAN FORM CHAINS BY MOVING FROM FACE TO FACE HORIZONTALLY, VERTICALLY OR DIAGONALLY. EACH FACE'S VALUE CHANGES AFTER A GROUP IS REMOVED, SO GETTING EXCEPTIONAL SCORES IS AS MUCH A MATTER OF TACTICS AS PATTERN FINDING.
WWW.KIKSTART.EU/CREEPY-COUPLES-FLASH

MORE GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .

DIVIDED



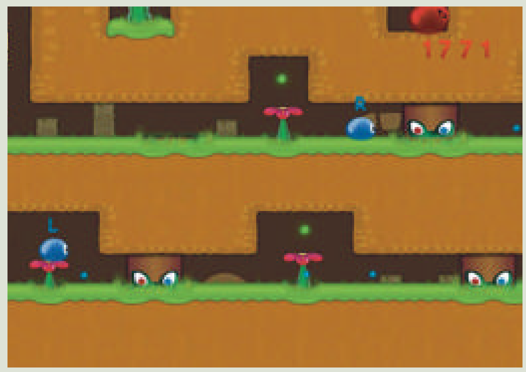
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/DIVIDED-XBLIG

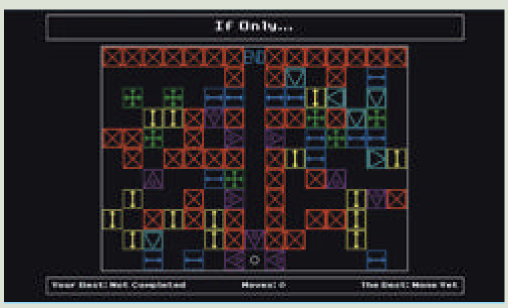
***Divided* is a** platform-based puzzler featuring a blue blob which must, for reasons that may never be revealed since there's no storyline provided, go forth into a cartoon-style scrolling world and multiply… quite literally! The landscape contains puzzles that from the very first level rely on the blob's party trick of being able to split into two smaller versions of itself. Both halves of the blob are controlled independently with each getting a thumb stick and shoulder button for movement and jumping respectively.

That's probably even more brainbending than it sounds as well because there are some puzzles where both will need to be moving simultaneously and, although the game places the letters L and R above the two half blobs to identify which stick they're being steered by, it does take quite a bit of concentration to avoid getting confused and trying to control the wrong one.

The puzzles themselves are tricky but fun and the sound and graphics serve their purpose well, but we can't recommend *Divided* unreservedly because it isn't going to suit a lot of players; not everybody has the hand to eye co-ordination required to juggle two objects at the same time and even those who do will still find it pretty challenging to play properly. Giving the trial download a go first is a must in this case.







THE RETURN OF CYBERBOX



» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/CYBERBOX-XBLIG

Single screen block-pushing puzzle games are common indie developer fodder, but *The Return Of CyberBox* does have a few design features that differentiate it from the others; the moveable blocks have markings which dictate how they move – for example ones with an arrow pointing up and down can only move vertically – and, as long as a row or column of blocks are all able to move in a specific direction, they can be pushed at the same time. These games stand or fall depending on the level designs, requiring quite a bit of advance planning before even the first move is made. But once a stage is completed, the game remembers it next time.

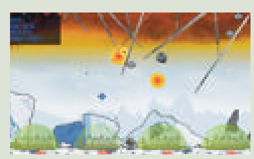


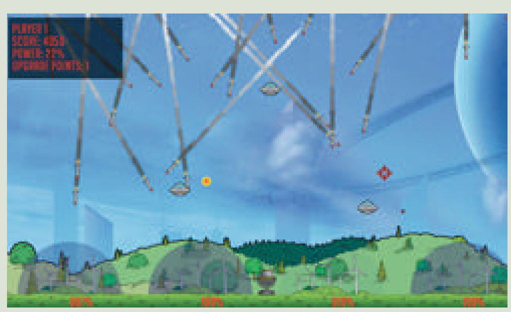
ALIEN SIEGE



» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/ALIEN-SIEGE-XBLIG

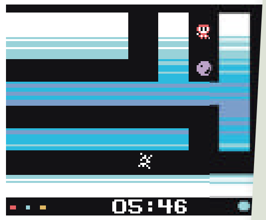
It looks like a graphically enhanced version of *Missile Command* and, unsurprisingly, plays like it as well. The objective is to protect four domed cities from incoming missiles by destroying the missiles with the lingering explosions from your own projectiles. Each city's shield is able to take about five hits before it's completely depleted and the buildings beneath are exposed to the next barrage. The three gun bases of the original game have been boiled down into just one missile launcher targeted with the left thumb stick, which has also been outfitted with a secondary projectile weapon which is used to blast incoming UFOs or asteroids out of the sky, and there's a weaponry upgrade shop between stages.

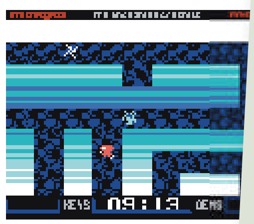






» The packaging for *Mage* is rather lovely.







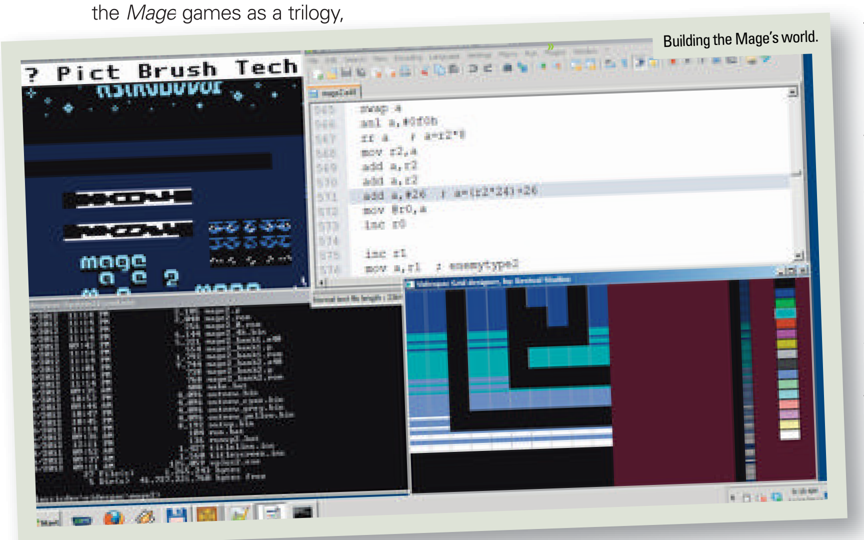
HOMEBREW HEROES

BACK IN ISSUE 108 WE ENTHUSED ABOUT VIDEOPAC AND ODYSSEY2 MULTI-SCREEN ACTION GAME MAGE: THE ENCHANTED CRYSTALS; THE DEVELOPER IS THE PROLIFIC MARTIJN WENTING OF REVIVAL STUDIOS WWW.REVIVAL-STUDIOS.COM – AND WE MANAGED TO INTERRUPT HIS CODING JUST LONG ENOUGH FOR A QUICK NATTER.

Q&A

Where did the idea for *Mage* originally come from?
Most Videopac/Odyssey2 games, including my own, have always been small and simple arcade type games where the goal is to simply get the highest score. I wanted to see if it was possible to do a more ambitious and story-driven game on this ancient system. To make sure I was able to tell a larger story, I designed the *Mage* games as a trilogy, with the other two games appearing in 2013 and 2014.

And how much did the Videopac's hardware dictate the shape of the game?
Quite a bit, mostly the memory (4096 bytes of rom-space, divided into pages of 256 bytes each). Also, the Videopac's graphics features are pretty much set in stone and there is little room for hacking-around, which is why you will always see two objects or enemies on each screen plus the player.



Building the Mage's world.

Were there any particularly good or bad moments during development?
The good was getting the colour interrupt routines in and seeing it work together with the Videopac+ background for the first time and the moment when I finalised the ROM and zipped up my development folder for the final backup.

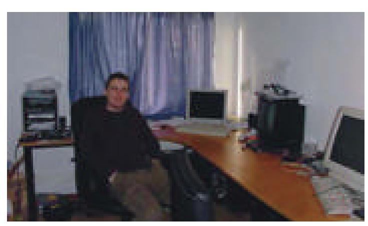
The bad was the actual development time it took to get this game done. The development of *Mage: The Enchanted Crystals* started right after I released *Astrododge* back in 2011 and took just as long as the development of all my other Videopac games up to this point combined. The ugly was the above-mentioned memory pages were also quite troublesome to work around. This meant that if I added one or two instructions to a specific routine, I had to move all of the routines in the game around to make it all fit again. In the end, almost every byte of ROM space is used up with only small gaps of a few bytes left.

Would you have done anything in *Mage* differently with hindsight?
The game's concept – a trilogy of three *Mage* games - was pretty well laid out on paper before I started programming, so the end result of this first title is more or less what I had in mind.

You've previously converted a lot of your own games to other platforms, have you any plans to port *Mage*?
No plans for a direct port as the game and its back story is pretty much designed for the Videopac/Odyssey2 specifically, although I have done some early work on a spin-off game for the Atari 2600.

And finally, can you tell us about anything you're currently working on at the moment?
Well, how many pages does **Retro Gamer** have available? For 2013 I am working on four new Videopac and Odyssey2 games, including the sequel to *Mage*, as well as a bunch of games for other platforms like the Colecovision, Commodore, MSX, Sega, ZX81, et cetera.

I've recently put a release list for 2013 up on my website that I will frequently update with the latest info.



» Martijn relaxing at his workstation.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What was your favourite PC Engine game?

The Laird
Has to be *Blazing Lazers* (known as *Gunhed* in Japan), for me this is pretty much the perfect vertically scrolling shooter. The graphics are superb with tons of sprites on screen, no slowdown and huge bosses. The soundtrack is also my favourite of any HuCard game.

the_hawk
Ah, a machine I would have absolutely LOVED to have had back in the day, so many brilliant shoot-em-ups. The best of which that I've played is *Gate Of Thunder*, an absolutely fantastic shooter.

ncf1
Drunken Master. I remember being incredibly intrigued by the title and seeing massive sprites my C64 could only dream of in some mag. In my head it became the ultimate game, for many years, until finally I got to play it on emulator. I found that it was actually rather crap but, see, I'd fantasized over it for so long that it became established firmly in my head as my favorite PC Engine game ever, and nothing – lord, NOTHING – was going to change my mind about that.

HalcyonDaze00
Vigilante, used to love this in the arcades and it had a great conversion on the PCE.

DreamcastRIP
Possibly Sega's *OutRun* – a game that showed what a sprite-scaling graphics monster the PC Engine could be when simulating Super Scaler technology far more impressively than Sega's very own Mega Drive subsequently did.

gman72
I always loved *Bloody Wolf* because it was a great little action game.

r0jaws
The PC Engine has great shmups; I love *Gunhed* and *Super Star Soldier.* But TBH my favourite game is *Bomberman 93.* I know it's not a system exclusive but the PC Engine does it so well.

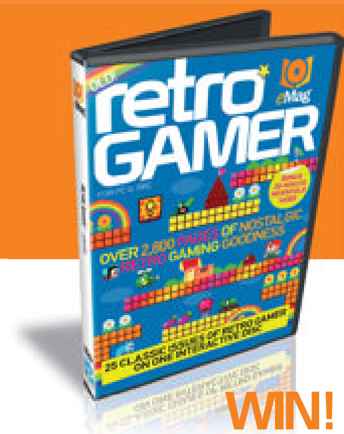
deadpan666
So far, I've only played two! *Ghost Manor* and *Makai Prince Dorabochan… Makai Prince* being my favourite! It's a great little platformer!

themightymartin
There are so many great games, but gun-to-my-head I'd have to choose *Bonk's Big Adventure.*

lavalyte
The screenshots for *R-Type* showed me that consoles were screaming ahead of my C64. I still knew I could never convince my parents to buy one.

AmigaJay
Loved the PC Kid series and *Devil Crash* games, but the most enjoyable has to be *Bomberman…* pure fun at its simplest … A true classic!

Mire Mare
Thanks to the Virtual Console on the Wii I got to play PCE versions of *R-Type*, the *Bonk* games, and a few more. My head says *Super Adventure Island 2*, but my heart says the 'one more go' gameplay of the first *Adventure Island.*



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

STAR LETTER

LORD OF MIDNIGHT

Dear Retro Gamer,

I'd just like to say how much I liked your tribute to Mike Singleton in this issue. Mike's game *The Lords Of Midnight* had a massive influence on me when I was growing up and it was fantastic to see so much space given to it and the rest of his classics. I was bullied a lot at school for being an overweight nerdy child, but *The Lords Of Midnight* gave me a place where I could escape. You'll be pleased to know that I've now grown into a well-adjusted adult with children of my own, but I retain a soft spot for Mike's games, regularly returning to *The Lords Of Midnight* and *Midwinter* whenever I get a chance. I guess what I'm trying to say is that his games meant a great deal to me and I'm glad that you did such a thorough job of making people realise why they were so important.

Jason Turner

Thanks for the kind words, Jason. We're glad you enjoyed the article. Chris did a cracking job on the feature, and judging by the response we had, you're not the only one who did.



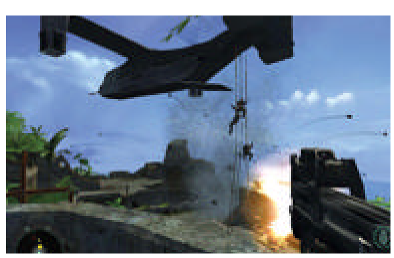
A FAR CRY

Dear Retro Gamer,

Now that *Far Cry 3* is available, will you consider running an article on the original? It was massive when it first appeared on PCs, as there was nothing quite like it. It boasted a huge open world, gripping story and amazing visuals. I'd love to read about where the inspiration for it originated. I think this would be the perfect time to run a feature, and maybe look at the series in general.

Mark Campion

Thanks for the letter, Mark, it's greatly appreciated. As much as we enjoy the original *Far Cry*, it's still a little too new to be covered in the magazine. We have an unwritten rule about what we cover, and tend to work around a ten-year gap for games; so *Far Cry* would still be a little too new at the moment. Still, it's only a year until 2014…



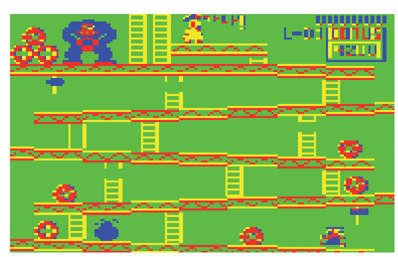
» **[PC]** *Far Cry* is a fantastic shooter, but don't expect to see it appear in the magazine any time soon.

WHERE IS THE LOVE?

Dear Retro Gamer,

Please could you run an article on the Dragon 32? It was the very first computer than I ever owned and I absolutely adored it. I've only started reading your magazine since the late Nineties and there is rarely any mention about games. There certainly hasn't been a hardware feature about it, so I can only assume that one was in an earlier issue and I missed it. I still have my machine and regularly play games like *Boulder Crash* and *Quazimodo*, which is an ace *Hunchback* clone and *Donkey King*, which was a rip-off of Nintendo's *Donkey Kong*. I'd love to see a bit more consideration giving to this Welsh wonder.

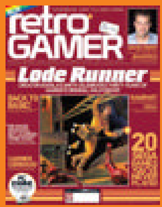
Dean Evans



» **[Dragon 32]** Dean has fond memories of *Donkey King*. We'll get some more Dragon 32 coverage in the mag later this year.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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You're right, Dean, we don't cover the Dragon 32 anywhere near as much as we should. We have a few freelancers in mind that would be perfect, so we'll have a word with them. A hardware article about the machine appeared in issue 37 if you're interested in tracking it down.

IS ZOMBIU RETRO?

Dear Retro Gamer,

Is *ZombiU* on the Wii U anything to do with the *Zombi* game that came out in the early Eighties? I've seen conflicting reports on various websites and interviews, and I was hoping you could clear it up for me. If it is, does that mean you'd be reviewing it in a future issue of **Retro Gamer**?

Ben Gibbons

We've spoken to Ubisoft a couple of times about this, but we've always been told that it's more a coincidence than anything else. We've certainly seen plenty of similarities between the two games, but that's all they appear to be. If we hear anything else, we'll take another look.



» [Wii U] We still don't know if this is a true sequel to *Zombi*. What we do know is that *ZombiU* is bloody scary.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Wii U

Darran purchased one, so he's been telling everyone how great *ZombiU* is and why *Nintendo Land* is the best game ever if you have kids. Jon wasn't impressed until he realised you could play *Black Ops 2* on it, while Stuart feels that Nintendo's launch line-up could have been stronger. He does like the sound of Ubisoft's *ZombiU* though.

FOUND IT

Dear Retro Gamer,

Thank you very much for printing my letter! Although you were unable to answer my question, I was still pleased to see my writing in the magazine.

About two weeks after I emailed you, I located the game I was asking about online. It was *The Soccer Game* by Wizard Games of Scotland, and was released in 1989. This was one of those early tongue-in-cheek games for MS-DOS that becomes abandonware. I wouldn't be surprised if some of your readers say that they found the game on Wikipedia. That's because, once I found the game, I created a Wikipedia article for it to celebrate my achievement.

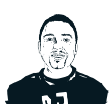
Back in 1989, it was a quirky concept to have a game as a football manager. I don't know what happened to Wizard Games. By the time of the sequel (*1-0 Soccer Manager*, easier to find online), they had re-located to Massachusetts. I don't know if they're still around somewhere.

Ed Aveyard

Glad to hear you discovered your game, Ed. An article on Wizard Games certainly sounds interesting, particularly as there doesn't seem to be much about them around. We'll do a little digging and see what we can find out.



★ THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY. . . This issue's covers that nearly happened



DARRAN

There's something about this cover that I love, possibly because Herman's artwork appears to be inspired by one of the *Thunderbirds* ships. Despite a new *Carrier Command* recently being released, we decided it wouldn't be as recognisable as *Lode Runner*.



STUART

There's something about NEC's tiny machine that screams **Retro Gamer**. We tried a few ideas in order to show it off, but we just couldn't hit on the right style for it and it just looked like a machine sitting on the cover. We're sure a great PC Engine cover exists, so we'll hopefully return to it at a later date.





Carrier Command art courtesy of Herman Serrano, visit www.rawsunlight.daportfolio.com for more information. Thanks to Adrian Mitchell for the scan.

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next month

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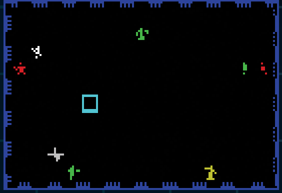
ON SALE | FEBRUARY 2013

MEGA COLLECTION

Our latest collector's guide focuses on Sega Mega Drive and the fantastic games and peripherals available for the system



Also inside



Chaos

■ Julian Gollop talks exclusively about the creation of his Spectrum strategy masterpiece, its sequel, and plans for his new iOS reboot

The Conversion Kings

■ 8-bit and 16-bit developers reveal how they were able to adapt classic arcade games to the humble home computer



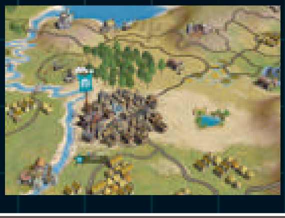


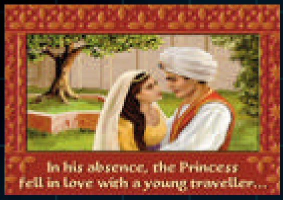
Power-Up!

■ From Mario's invincibility star, to R-Type's The Force: We reveal the greatest videogame power-ups of all time

Civilization

■ Sid Meier reveals the creation of his original strategy hit and the impact the franchise has had on the genre





Jordan Mechner

■ Prince Of Persia's creator discusses entering the industry, his classic franchise and what he has planned for the future


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ENDGAME



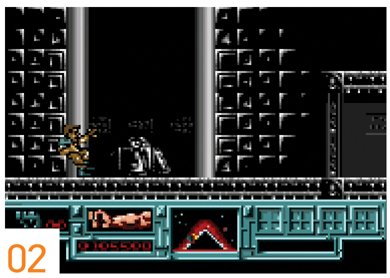
TOTAL RECALL

» Based on the 1990 movie adaptation of the Philip K. Dick short story We Can Remember It For You Wholesale, Total Recall was a mind-bending sci-fi action film that saw Arnold Schwarzenegger paying for expensive implants that go horribly wrong. To recover his memory, he must travel to Mars. For some reason…



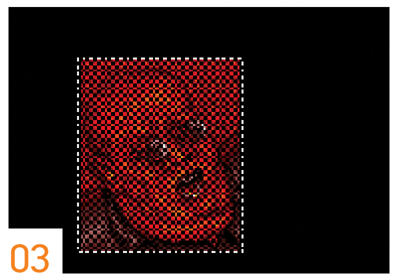
01

» On Mars, Quaid (Arnie) fights his way to the mines where the alien reactor is found. Yes, there are aliens involved. Looking at it, he sees a hand-shaped mould and places his hand onto it. Here's hoping it's the power button.



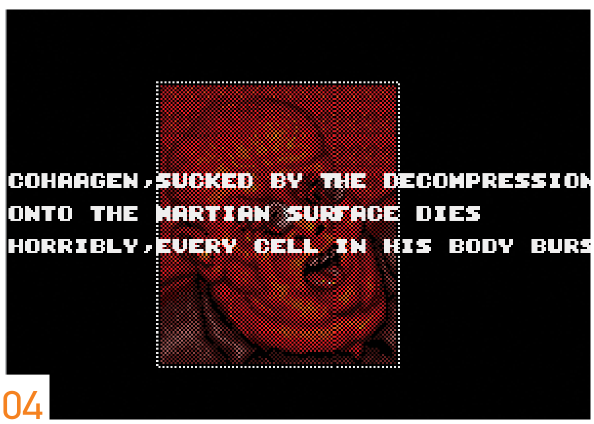
02

» Cohaggen then detonates a bomb, shattering the protective glass that shields tourists from the deadly atmosphere outside. Quaid is flung back from the blast, and sucked outside to the deadly outer surface.



03

» Cohaggen's plan backfires though as both men hit the sand and bodies begin boiling and bloating due to the pressure outside. This probably could have been avoided through some generous application of factor 30 sun cream.



04

» Looking a bit like a half man half tomato that has been stung by millions of angry wasps and then left to sleep off the attack on a super powered sun bed, Cohaggen dies in the most painful way imaginable as every cell in his body explodes.



05

» Thankfully the reactor begins altering the atmosphere on Mars, making it safe for humans. Clearly none of the cells inside Quaid's body exploded, so he was able to walk away unscathed from the mutation process. He celebrates by hugging a woman.


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